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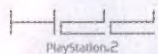
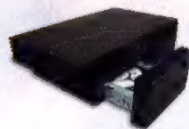
# mystery XI

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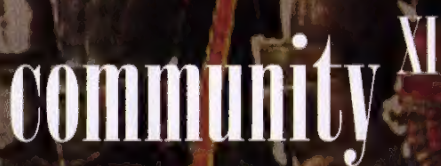
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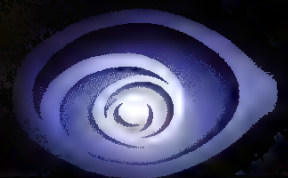
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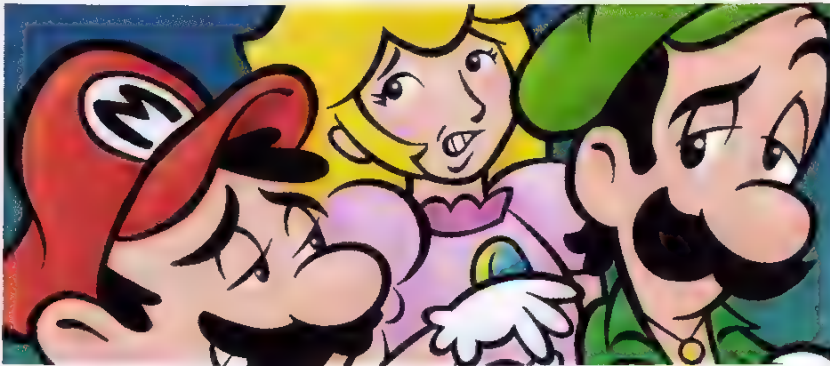
### 36 JAK 3

Featuring actual development of its characters, making area transport fun again, and fashioning a true update to the respected Jak saga is a tough list of ingredients for Naughty Dog to supply. But, hungry gamers demand, and it looks like they will receive.

### 44 RATCHET AND CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

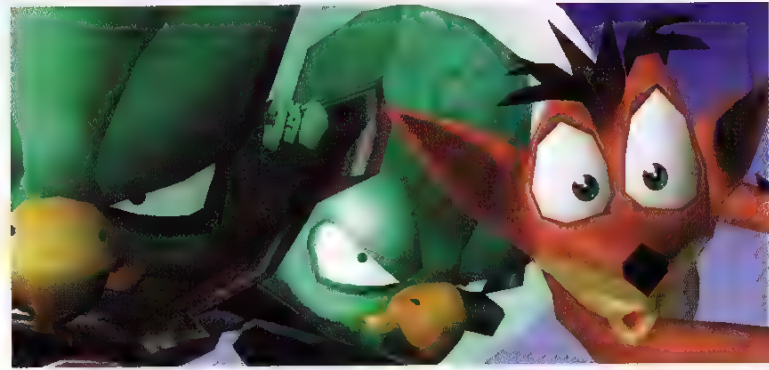
It hasn't really been all that long since players got their hands on the last Ratchet and Clank game, but we've already visited with the development team about what they have planned for part three. See what's up their sleeve to increase the already frantic action we saw in the last edition.

## FEATURES



### 51 GAME INFARCKER

No one is safe this year from the highbrow satire found in the revered pages of this annual feature. We've pulled out all of the stops and shamelessly mocked the industry we so love just to make you laugh.



### 59 CRASH BANDICOOT: TWINSANITY

Everyone's favorite bandicoot has some big changes in store and we're breaking the seal of silence to let fans in on what could be the biggest shakeup possible for the loveable Crash. Are Crash and Cortex teaming up?

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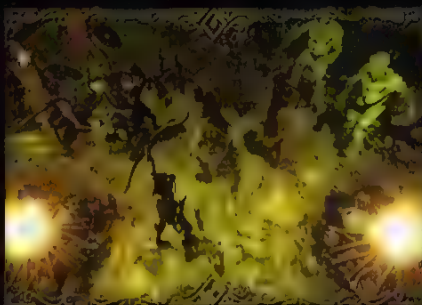
**- GameSpy**

**5 out of 5**

**- Stuff Gamer**

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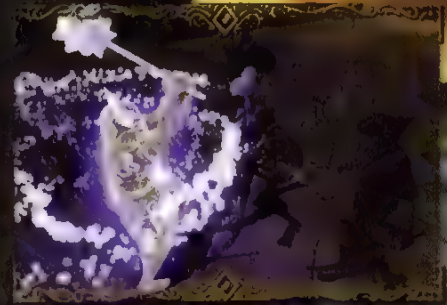
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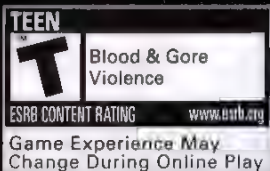
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**PlayStation 2**





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Danger, fine reader, danger! The team's collective noodles have been spinning lately and here's a rundown of what's on our minds.

## 16 GI SPY

The Game Informer paparazzi stalk the video game industry, bringing you candid photos of all the action.

## 18 DEAR GI

Commentary on racial diversity in gaming, dialogues on upcoming movies, and emotional pleas pertaining to literary species – it's almost like readers are writing term papers. Except, of course, for that Drake guy. He's just a crazy.

## 24 NEWS

We prepare a feast for the eyes with a sneak peek at Halo 2 and Mortal Kombat: Deception. Also, see how the Jaguar continues its painful legacy in the dentist's office.

## 64 PREVIEWS

Companies are starting to spill the beans on some previously unheard of games that look more than promising. It's enough to get even the most cold-hearted gamer to warm up a bit.

## 86 REVIEWS

Big-name titles are finally showing up after high profile delays. Were they worth the wait? Well, we're not going to tell you here – go to the review section and find out! That's why we have a whole section devoted to scoring upcoming games...so that you'll read the reviews. Lazy, man. Just plain lazy.

## 113 CHARTS

What's hot? What's not? What's up? What's down? It's not NASDAQ, it's the Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games.

## 116 SECRET ACCESS


If you're stuck, we'll be there. If you want main characters to have big heads, we'll be there. Even when you want your level 56 mage to execute super fire, we'll be there too. We're like a warm, caring, uncle – there to help you out.

## 120 CLASSIC GI

Could adventure gaming of yore really be dead? GI is hoping not and talking to a few people inclined – no, determined – to make sure that it doesn't go away. There are reasons that people liked these games so much, so why is the genre largely passed over?

## 124 ETC

We round out the quirky with the useful in our patented back page of shopping and whimsy. See what's tickling our fancy and gracing our homes this month.

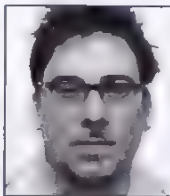
A full-page photograph of Tracy McGrady in a blue Orlando Magic jersey with the number 1. He is holding a basketball in his right hand, looking upwards with an open mouth as if shouting or celebrating. He is wearing a white wristband on his left wrist and white sneakers with blue accents. The background is dark and out of focus.

Great for dunking.

My friends told me, "T-Mac, you're gonna be big some day." Must've been the milk. About 15% of your height is added as a teen and the calcium and vitamin D can help. Will drinking a cool glass of milk make you the hottest scorer in town? Hey, it couldn't hurt.

got milk?

# EDITORS' FORUM



## OLD SCHOOL

**ANDY McNAMARA**  
andy@gameinformer.com  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It's amazing to watch how the world of video gaming evolves each and every year, and how it makes massive bounds with each new hardware generation. It's even more impressive when you sit back and think about the fact that just a short 19 year ago, Super Mario Bros. and NES broke onto the scene and revitalized the market after the great video game crash of 1983. (On a side note, I sure hope Nintendo has something special planned for Super Mario's 20th Anniversary.)

With each new innovation, I fall in love with gaming all over again, but I can't help but always have a soft spot in my heart for the classics. Whether it's playing Yar's Revenge on my 2600 or cracking out my copy of Front Mission 3 on the PSone, there is always a plethora (thanks, *Three Amigos!*) of great games to play.

This month we have an exclusive look at a set of platforming classics, both new school and old school. Jak and Ratchet, in my opinion, have quickly established themselves as modern-day classics of the PlayStation 2 era.

And in the old school department we have a feature on the next generation take on the PSone-era mega-hit Crash Bandicoot. Which incidentally, no longer has any association with its original developer, Naughty Dog - who worked on the original three Crash platformers, and the first Crash racing game, Crash Team Racing.

Some have said that the heyday of the platformer is behind us, and that the video game roost is ruled by the likes of Grand Theft Auto and Halo. While I would agree that the landscape has changed, I know I wouldn't want to live in a world without my beloved platformers.

Of course, this is also the April issue, so enjoy the annual return of Game Infarcer, and make sure to come back here next month when Game Informer finally breaks Halo 2 out of its shell and into the limelight with a landslide of exclusive information.

**PS:** I also want to remind readers that the The Edge, our newest review addition, which breaks down the advantages and disadvantages for multiplatform games, will only appear when there are differences between platforms.

**CORRECTION:** In last month's cover story there were a couple of errors. Resident Evil originally came out in 1996, not 1997, and RE 4 takes place in Europe, not South America. Also, in the sidebar This Month in Gaming History, we had a brainfart and put the PS2 launch in Japan as March 4, 2002, instead of the real year of 2000. We are sorry for the mistakes. The appropriate editors have been flogged.

**REINER** | reiner@gameinformer.com

I had the strangest dream the other night. I was waiting in line at the launch of Nintendo DS, praying that the store wouldn't run out of units before I made it to the counter. Everyone who walked by me had one in hand. They couldn't take their eyes off of it. They were saying things along the lines of, "This is the greatest handheld ever!" and "Video games have never been better!" As time went on, and I slowly moved toward the register, people started screaming. As it turns out, those who were playing the Nintendo DS went cross-eyed - just like the sunglasses gag in *The Jerk*. I awoke sweating and shaking, and hoping that this was just a dream and not a premonition.

**MATT** | matt@gameinformer.com

I'm glad that this month's cover story is bringing the spotlight back to my all-time favorite gaming genre: the platformer. And you certainly couldn't have two better examples of the modern platformer than Jak 3 and Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal. I get upset when I hear gamers tag these games as "kiddie" just because they have cute characters and a cartoonish look, when in actuality they have a lot more challenging and complex gameplay than most of the edgy "adult" products flooding the market in recent years. I mean, what's a more truly revolutionary game: Viewtiful Joe or The Suffering? Just because something is dark doesn't mean it's deep.

**KATO** | kato@gameinformer.com

The next-next generation of gaming is already starting to be talked about, and things are getting interesting. While the Xbox doesn't have the numbers to compare to the PlayStation 2, Microsoft has survived, and more importantly, picked up a huge amount of name recognition - which is more important than money. The upcoming console launch battle poses the question: Is coming out first the key to victory? Nintendo, meanwhile, is threatening to cease being a company for casual players despite its vanilla philosophy. With each passing day a new generation of gamers identifies with Halo or GTA, rather than Mario. Then again, this last round of consoles proved that the market was big enough for to accommodate three. Perhaps the next batch will have each system carving out its own niche.

**LISA** | lisa@gameinformer.com

Even though Uru Live's cancellation isn't an earth-shaking announcement for many, I've been thinking about it a lot. It seems that what fans are having problems with right now (and this pertains to all games) is that this industry needs to make money. Ever wonder why some games get cancelled entirely or prominent features are missing when it finally releases? Well, it's sometimes because a development cycle needed to be cut short to make a certain deadline or there wasn't enough perceived interest to sustain servers for an online game. We, as players, can gripe about it, but eventually we have to realize that this world isn't an entertainment utopia, and companies still need to worry about money. Bummer.

**JEREMY** | jeremy@gameinformer.com

With the recent crop of remakes and updates, the games of yesterday seem to be the hot item today, and no company owns nostalgia like Nintendo. While it obviously has some strong titles on the way, the GameCube could still use some help. So why doesn't Nintendo release anthologies of their classic games for the Cube? Discs patterned after the Legend of Zelda bonus disc would certainly sell, especially at a budget price. Even if they aren't as slick as the current crop of titles, I for one would jump at the chance to play old favorites without having to deal with the inconsistent old NES. Much like old movies, classic games deserve to live on.

**ADAM** | adam@gameinformer.com

I hate it when I go back to a game that I remember enjoying back in the day, and find that it no longer cuts it. Even timeless classics like Super Metroid and Final Fantasy VII have problems that I can no longer forgive, especially when there are newer titles that eclipse their predecessors in every way. Think about it: How incredibly annoying is it to have to use the select button to cycle weapons, instead of just having R be the missile toggle? How absolutely horrid are the character models in FF VII? I swear, you can count Cloud's polygons. Maybe my gaming palette is just becoming more refined, but it seems like some titles are best left as memories, rather than hauled out of the closet to tarnish their remembered glory.

**JOE** | joe@gameinformer.com

So, I've been watching a lot of Adult Swim lately, and I can't help but think about the relationship between anime and video games these days. It seems that they are strongly linked industries, and they venture into each other's territory frequently. The problem with these crossovers is that they are so hit and miss: Pokémon practically resurrected the Game Boy, but Robotech: Battlecry sold like soggy pancakes. I can understand how a game based on a movie might be a dud, but why is it so hard for an anime, which oftentimes feels like a video game without controllers, to transition successfully? I just hope the upcoming Cowboy Bebop game doesn't turn out to be another Lupin III: Treasure of the Sorcerer King.

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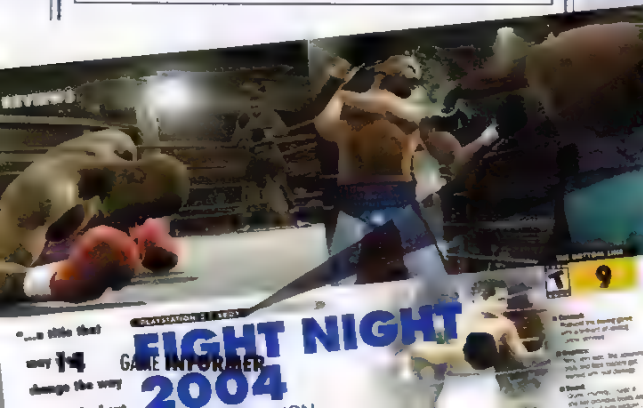
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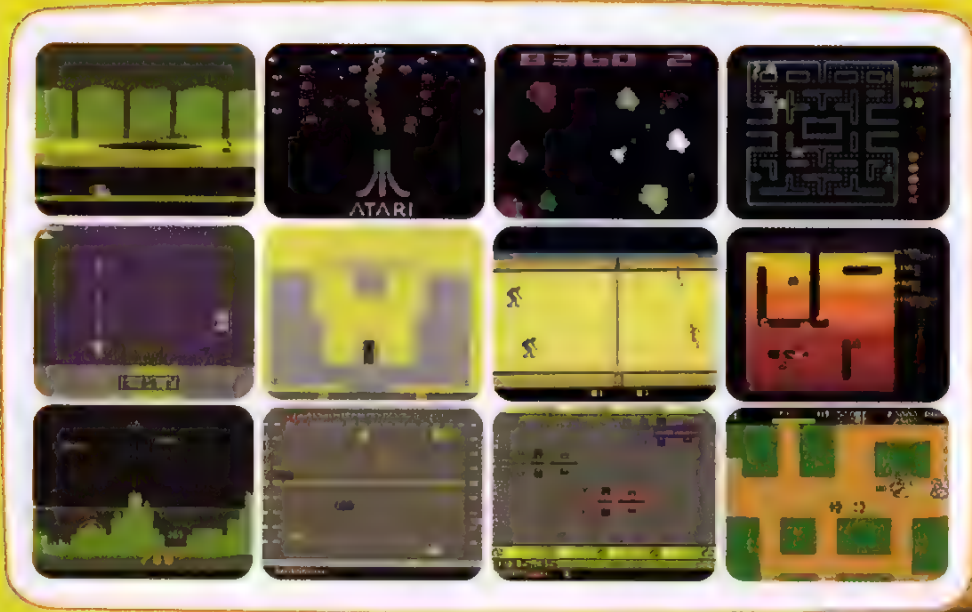
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# GI SPY



7



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6

**CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY**

**1** The GI Posse chills with Sony's Carme Atuvilla before the NHL All-Star Game. Reiner looks mad because he thought they were supposed to be going to see Scott Hamilton in Smucker's Stars on Ice tour **2** Okay now we're starting to believe you really are a gamer, Paris. So we're sorry about that time we called you a professional skank...and for all those times we called your house and hung up...and about that time we were caught outside of your mansion sifting through your garbage; Call us, please! **3** The Naughty Dogs pose on the balcony of their plush new digs. From left to right: Christophe Balestra, Dan Arey, Evan Wells, Jason Rubin, and the newest member of the litter, Amy Hennig (formerly of Crystal Dynamics) **4** Reiner and Billy, seen here meeting the commissioner of the NHL, Gary Bettman (!!). Afterwards, they were arrested by league officials and severely beaten **5** GI Online's Chris Cook is pleased to meet the ever-elusive creator of Metal Gear Solid, Hideo Kojima **6** THQ's David Kim (left) and Kathy Mendoza (right) pose with Heavy Iron Studio's Lyle Hall, the winner of the prestigious Talles Guy in GI Spy This Month award **7** Matt hangs at Sony's Santa Monica studios with Sony's Ron Eagle (left) and freelance journalist and game historian Steve Kent (right)



5



4



3

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the clubs, cars and crew...  
...You gotta  
have the  
Moves.*



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**PlayStation 2**



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# DEAR GI

## VALID SOURCE MATERIAL >>>

I am not only an avid gamer, but a schoolteacher whose students read old copies of Game Informer during their free time. I also use your reviews for examples of how to write persuasively while using an interesting and entertaining voice. Your magazine as a learning tool...who knew?

Michelle Compton  
Eunice, LA

■ We each printed out your letter and sent it to our parents – it seems to have eased their disappointment caused by our career choices. Man, parents just don't understand.



## BIGGER QUESTIONS >>>

Thank you for addressing issues of race in your last issue ["Race in Video Games: An Unequal Face" issue 130]. As both a community worker and a video game junkie, I often find myself considering matters of race in video games (and other arenas of pop culture) and why no one seems to write about them in the many video game magazines I read. Most recently I was wondering why no one addressed the fact that there are few, if any, Asian American characters in games like *Midnight Club II* and *Need For Speed: Underground* – even though Asian Americans are the ones who created, and who make up the majority of, the American import-racing scene. Yes, *Midnight Club II* had Japanese racers in Japan, but the Asian American import scene is a different subculture.

I could go on and on about my thoughts regarding race in video games, but the main purpose of this letter is to thank you for printing the aforementioned article. It's the main reason I decided to renew my subscription to *Game Informer*.

Thien-bao Thuc Phi  
Minneapolis, MN

How are my favorite magazine editors this fine day? This is in response to the article "Race in Video Games: An Unequal Face." First, I am a young African American male gamer. It's true that I don't really recall many non-stereotypical black people in video games, but am I mad? Nope. It's just like you said in your article: Hip-Hop and rap sell things, as sad as that sounds.

Why do you think Sprite and McDonalds have rap in the ads? They're trying to make them sell. Even Grabbed by the Ghoulies has a black guy in the commercial that leaves e's and r's unpronounced.

rpglover01  
Via email

■ These are just a few of the responses we got about the *Race in Video Games* piece, and all were glad that we brought up the subject. Without being able to outright solve the problem, we're hoping that at least broaching the topic is a start in the right direction.

## WE'RE SORRY ALREADY >>>

In your February issue [130] under your Classic Feature section page 126, you write about the *Wing Commander* movie. You state that, "unlike the reptilian aliens in the games, the Kilrathi in the movie resembled catlike Muppets"? The Kilrathi were in fact a catlike race, which is what the movie was based upon. The reptiles didn't come out until the fifth installment of the series after the Kilrathi were defeated.

CrossChexs  
Via email

What do you mean by, "unlike the REPTILIAN aliens in the game, the Kilrathi in the movie resembled CATLIKE Muppets." Okay, I'll give you the Muppet thing, but they were not only catlike – they were cats! How in the world can you mix up reptiles and cats? Well, if you really don't know, here's a little pointer: Cats go meow, and most reptiles go hiss.

Carl  
Miami, FL

I just wanted to point out that in one of your articles about video game movies, you mentioned that the movie and game differed because the game had the Kilrathi as reptiles, and the movie had them as cat monsters. Actually, the Kilrathi were always feline people in the game. But yeah, that movie did suck.

Ben  
Via email

While reading your article "Movies and Games: A History of Sadness" in issue 130, I noticed a pretty obvious error in your description of the *Wing Commander* movie. You wrote, "Unlike the reptilian aliens in the games, the Kilrathi in the movie resembled catlike Muppets." Obviously, whoever wrote the article hasn't played the games, since the Kilrathi are catlike. While I agree that the Kilrathi in the movie were poorly designed, they were at least feline.

Keith McCallon  
Via earthlink.net

■ Okay, okay people. We get it! *Game Informer* screwed up and we're really, really sorry to the catlike Kilrathi who most obviously share no resemblance with any member of the reptile community. Firmly and repeatedly, we are corrected – now stop with the suspicious packages already!

## MOVE OVER EBERT? >>>

The true coup de grace of issue 130 was the review of *The House of the Dead* movie ["GI Goes to the Movies," issue 130]. I have never laughed harder, and I thank you for making this reader a very happy monkey.

Jennifer  
Via msn.com

■ Due to popular demand (from Jennifer and a legion of others), we happily present to our readers *Game Informer Goes to the Movies: Part Deux*; with your hosts, Jeremy and Reiner.

Jeremy: *This month we are reviewing Kevin Smith's future classic Jersey Girl.*

Reiner: *Ah...I didn't actually see that film. I couldn't bring myself to do it.*

Jeremy: *Neither did I, but I did see the trailer. That was more than enough. So let's just review that instead.*

Reiner: *I think that the trailer is all that anyone will see.*

Jeremy: *I wonder when Kevin Smith was replaced with a 36-year-old woman.*

Reiner: *I don't know. At least he'll have Ben Affleck to sit on the couch with after both of their careers are over...which should be the day this film releases.*

Jeremy: *I will give it one thing. It makes Daredevil look like a tolerable movie.*

Reiner: *Liv Tyler is hot.*

Jeremy: *Yes...She most certainly is.*

Reiner: *So...*

Jeremy: *Yeah, I got nothin'.*

Thanks guys! That was, like your earlier foray into movie criticism, extremely informative and most unquestionably enlightening. Liv Tyler certainly is hot.

## SHOCKED AND APPALLED >>>

I am shocked that you gave Drake of the 99 Dragons a 7.2 in your January 2004 issue [#130]. What is the problem, man? I think that it's one of the best third-person shooters for Xbox. I especially like the running on the wall trick that Drake can do. I will admit that the storyline is a bit iffy, but the freeze-time feature alone should have gotten the game at least a 7. I mean, come on! How many times did that feature get you out of a tight spot? All I'm asking is that you please reconsider the rating that you gave that wonderful game.

Orta B.  
Atlanta, GA

■ Hold on...we're thinking...um...just a second... Sorry, no, we will not change Drake's impressively low rating. We thought about it, even considered having a staff meeting, but in the end opted to go with the original score because the game, well, it just isn't good. Instead, we'd like to suggest a few other games that successfully use the ability to freeze or slow time and don't play like warmed-over chicken cordon bleu from a questionable cafeteria. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* and *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* are both good examples, available on Xbox, and are titles you won't be mocked for owning. Now go shopping.





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PlayStation.2

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## ENVELOPE ART

### TRUTH IN ADVERTISING >>>

Bunnies....don't trust them.

Krystal Diaz  
Bellport, NY

While watching a documentary recently, we discovered that Krystal is indeed correct, and not just paranoid, in her statement that bunnies are untrustworthy. It's something about genetic recombination and that fluffy tail, but we weren't entirely paying attention to the finer details. All we know is that cute little woodland creatures are never to be taken at face value.

### DUDE, SERIOUSLY >>>

How in the world did you send me a magazine this month without a single Xbox review? Were there no games being released that met your criteria? After finding out that you shunned the most incredible game system on the market by excluding recent reviews, I am sickened. It takes a heartless individual to edit out the games produced for the 'Box.

Now what? Do I go all month without knowledge of good or evil games? Do I spend countless hours renting worthless games only to make up my own mind on the playability of crappy games? No, I will sit and wait for another issue of your mag and toss this one in the garbage. Could you guys recall this issue, put some Xbox data into it, and ship it back out?

What in the world am I going to do with all this worthless PS2, GameCube, GBA, and PC crap? Oh, but I guess you did give me some previews - which none of us readers can play right now. Gee, thanks.

Curry Russell  
Via email

Here's the deal, readers, we shook a few of you up last month - but it's all really okay, you can calm down. We're not crazy, and you're all still getting used to some new upgrades to GI. There are going to be months, and there have already been months, where one system's review section seems small, and in the case Curry outlined above, it may even be missing. But, we offer reviews for each system in every issue of GI - sometimes, though, a lot of them will be in the multi-platform review section. Check it out and consider a multi-platform review the same as one for your console of choice.

### SCORING THE FUTURE >>>

I'm wondering how you make your decision on what score to give MMORPGs. By participating in multiple games of this type I've realized that most of my fun came after putting a lot of hours into it - somewhere in the range of 30 days. Also, most MMORPGs cannot be finished, as they are pretty much non-linear and many have no story endpoint. I have to ask how you accurately get a feel for these games. Do you just play them for a really long time, or do you get special clearances to characters of different levels and varieties?

Ayam  
Via email

MMORPGs have thrown a bit of a wrench into the smoothly churning system of our reviewing process. Basically, we do play them for a really long time, but more importantly, we're scoring a time and a place - and that's usually a time before the game goes public and before the servers populate with players. These titles change drastically based on expansion packs (the improvements in Star Wars Galaxies cannot be denied, nor the roller coaster ride of PlanetSide's major expansion packs, for example), and sometimes more dramatically based on who is playing them. We do our best, but we can't score what may become of a game, only what's there when we get to play it.



Dago Orozco

"You should have never recorded 'Not a Girl, Not Yet a Zombie,' Ms. Spears"

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault.

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Andrew Cole

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Brian  
Langenwaker  
Bob Hoskins  
reprises the role  
that made him  
famous



Joseph  
Geidell  
"Can  
someone  
lend me  
a hand?  
This stuff  
is really  
sticky."

Lizze B.  
Olivas  
Even super-  
heroes visit  
GlamorShots



George Young  
"Fear us! For we  
are Giant Cat-Link  
Guy and his band of  
merry troublemak-  
ers!"

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PlayStation.2



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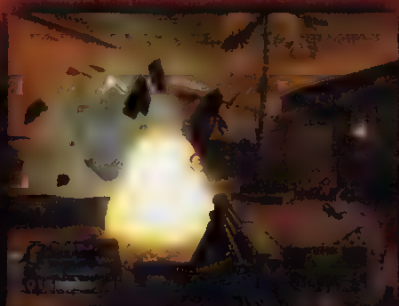
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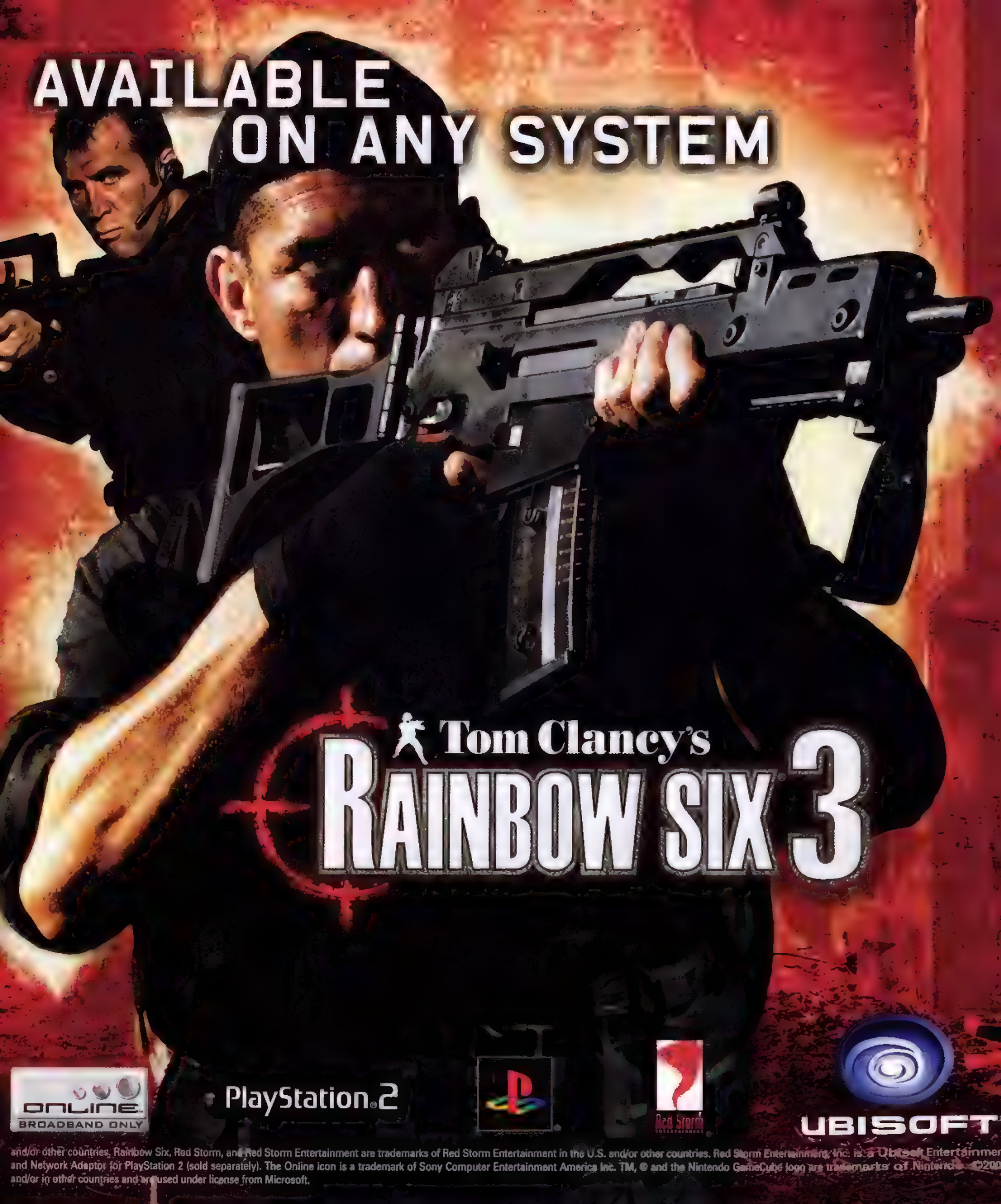
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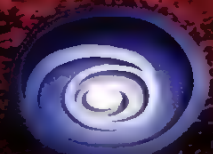
AVAILABLE  
ON ANY SYSTEM



Tom Clancy's  
**RAINBOW SIX 3**



PlayStation 2



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## HALO 2 SHOOTING TO KILL



**Halo 2** developer **Bungie** put a lump of coal in a lot of stockings last Christmas when the sequel didn't materialize – something Bungie claims it never promised in the first place. Now, however, the studio feels confident in announcing an official release date of fall for *Halo 2*. A message on its website reads: "So remember last year when we told you we don't announce release dates until we're confident we'll meet our deadline? Well now we're confident. *Halo 2* will ship in fall, 2004. Please make a note of it."

Just to smooth over any other hurt feelings, the developer has given us the first-ever screens of multiplayer action for the **Xbox** title. Nothing but love here.



# NEW MORTAL KOMBAT CAUSES FATALITIES

Midway has revealed a few bits of information about the latest *Mortal Kombat* (for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox) title, *Mortal Kombat: Deception*. Using an enhanced version of the *Deadly Alliance* engine, Midway promises photo-realistic character models as well as multi-tiered environments and – in a first for the series – online play. The newly released trailer offered up even more detail. Baraka appears prominently, while Sub-Zero, Scorpion, and Mileena make cameos. Some grisly stage fatalities were shown as well – one character was tossed into a lava pool, and another was kicked in between two giant spiked posts, which ground the character into paste and sprayed blood everywhere! As if that wasn't enough to get your blood lust on, *Deception* is taking the series to exciting new places. It will feature several intriguing gameplay types, including a free-roaming quest mode (with time-sensitive fights) where you'll unlock *MK* items as you go. Also confirmed are a chess-based battle mode and a very interesting puzzle game type reminiscent of *Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo*. Best of all, each of these new modes is available online.

## GTA GOES TO SAN ANDREAS

Despite our belief that the new *Grand Theft Auto* would take place in Las Vegas, **Rockstar** officially announced that we're dead wrong. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is the next iteration in the series, and it'll appear "exclusively" for the PlayStation 2 on October 19. Although the franchise has appeared on the Xbox in the form of the *GTA Double Pack* (last November), it is unknown when and/or if *San Andreas* will appear on the Microsoft console.

Revealing nothing about the game, Rockstar president **Sam Houser** did, however, acknowledge that the company expects to kick major ass and make a lot of dough with this release. "Even though we still have eight months to go, we are starting to become very proud of what we have achieved and we can't wait to get the game into players' hands."



## SONY DELAYS PSP

**Sony** has officially delayed the release of its **PlayStation Portable** (PSP) handheld unit until spring 2005 in North America. The PSP will come out in Japan before the end of the year as planned, but isn't expected until, at the latest, the end of the fiscal year (March) over here. Ironically, it was America where Sony chose to first announce this project – at the E3 convention in Los Angeles last May.

According to Sony, timing with launch software is the reason. The company says it has received wide interest from developers regarding the system. "In order to ensure that the launch timeframe is well supported," said Sony PR specialist Ryan Bowling, "we want to allow developers and publishers sufficient time to optimize content for our new portable entertainment platform." Developers, who have already received their dev kits, have been notified. Companies like **Electronic Arts**, **Sega**, **Activision**, and many more have signed on to make titles for the system. Sony has already put out its first concept design for the PSP (shown), but we expect more details such as pricing to hopefully come down at this year's E3. Perhaps this delay will be advantageous to **Nintendo** and its newly announced **Dual Screen** handheld, which is speculated to release before the PSP during this holiday season.



R.D.

Game Informer's research and development operatives search the globe, seeking out the untapped licenses that will become tomorrow's killer games. If you have any great ideas for games of the future, be sure to drop us a line. Maybe we'll use our god-like power over the video game industry to turn you into a millionaire – or just steal your idea.

KULL THE CONQUEROR

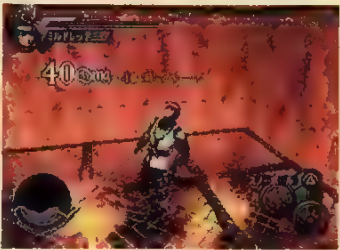


Games licensed from movies are obviously really hot right now, and a lot of developers are picking up movie rights like it was going out of style. We hear there's even a first-person shooter based on *The English Patient* on the way. But there is one movie that is absolutely perfect for a game, and

everyone seems to have overlooked it. It may, in fact, be the only movie in existence that hasn't had its rights purchased for a game adaptation. But we can't imagine why, it was a huge hit – easily the biggest film of 1997. Heck, it's one of the most popular movies of all time! It won all kinds of awards, including the Oscar for best picture, best director, and best actor. That's right, we're talking about *Kull the Conqueror*, starring TV's Hercules, Kevin Sorbo. How has nobody snapped up the rights to this one yet? The movie has all the elements of a great, million-selling title. In this game, you'd...fight stuff. You know, with a big sword. And there would be dragons, and stuff. And, let's see, there would be a bad guy who you'd have to beat. And there would be magic. And some wailin' heavy metal guitar! Kevin Sorbo and Tia Carrere would reprise their characters from the movie and do the voices. We know they're not busy. In fact, Kevin Sorbo delivered us a pizza last week! So anyway, this game, it would be cool.

NAME THAT SWI

After making a deal with the devil, your job is to lure adventurers and kill them in assorted nasty ways so Satan can be resurrected. After you lay your traps, you must use yourself as bait to lead people to their doom (in a first person view). You can then decide whether you want to cash in your victim for money or magic points. You can also use their bodies to create monsters in this Tecmo PSone title.



(Answer on page 32)

TOP 10 RANDOM THINGS HEARD AROUND THE OFFICE

- 10 "N.Gage: It's into that sort of thing"
- 9 "That's dumb. Neil Gaiman ruined Marvel"
- 8 "Chicken is best in ring form"
- 7 "I'm sure you're very smart apple sauce; the smartest apple sauce ever"
- 6 "I think I owe you some lotion"
- 5 "Your love for toys and your love for chicken are at odds"
- 4 "The rabbit killed a whole bunch of people, but then he got tired"
- 3 "Have you been fluffing?"
- 2 "Did I ever tell you the story of the Siegfried & Roy animated movie?"
- 1 "I'm just not down with sperm"

DEVELOPER TOP 5

LARRY HOLLAND  
FOUNDER  
TOTALLY GAMES



- 1 Civilization (series) – PC
- 2 Tetris – Arcade
- 3 Doom/Quake (series) – PC
- 4 Seahaven Towers – Mac
- 5 No One Lives Forever – PC

READER TOP 5

MARK KILLEEN  
LAKE ORION  
MICHIGAN



- 1 Shenmue II – Xbox
- 2 Shenmue – DC
- 3 Street Fighter Alpha 3 – DC
- 4 Street Fighter III: Third Strike – DC
- 5 Capcom Vs. SNK 2: EO – GC

Games Informer is looking for your top five favorite games. Please send your Top Five and a photo of yourself to:

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(attach digital picture)

Everyone that enters each month will be entered in a drawing to win a \$100 Starbucks gift certificate.



URU LIVE DROPPED

The online portion of adventure title *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst* for the PC is being yanked. This portion of the game, which would have allowed players to explore further ages online and build virtual neighborhoods, has been cancelled by publisher **Ubisoft** and developer **Cyan Worlds** because there wasn't sufficient enough interest to pay for the endeavor – despite *Ages Beyond Myst*'s strong sales.

The content that was going to be featured in the online portion will now be added into a free download called *To D'ni* and an expansion pack that should be available by the end of the year.

In other sad Ubisoft online news, the company says it is pulling out of the co-publishing deal it shared with **Warner Bros.** to put out the **Monolith**-developed *Matrix Online* PC title. Warner Bros. will still publish the game, and the developer says that it remains on track for a November release.

XBOX LIVE EXPANDS

**Microsoft** has begun to talk about its plans for upgraded features for **Xbox Live**, which has been code-named **Tsunami**. Although these new aspects of the online service are planned to start this spring, it is up to developers to integrate them into their games. So, the complete lineup may take some time to get going in full effect.

The first new features will be live gaming alerts and instant messaging services through **MSN**. In what may be a hint that **Xbox Next** may not feature a hard drive, one of the new components of the service is called "title-managed online storage," which is a way for players to store and share data through Microsoft's own network. The company says that this is being done to encourage the community aspect of Live through the trading of such things as mottos, emblems, and updated maps and rosters. Also towards this end, Microsoft wants to allow more user-created competitions and built-in features like team statistics and challenges.



THQ'S FAMILY AFFAIR

**Pixar** may have just ended its relationship with **Disney**, but a few more films are still coming down the pipeline. *The Incredibles* is arriving in November, and **THQ** and developer **Heavy Iron Studios** are planning to be there with video game in hand.

The story revolves around a family of retired superheroes thrust back into the spotlight. The game lets you get your hands on each person's particular powers in third-person action/adventure settings based on the movie. As such, Pixar is working hard with the developer to make sure that the game is as fun as the movie looks. Expect *The Incredibles* for all major consoles.



TOURNAMENTS  
-24/7-

ALL LEVELS OF PLAY

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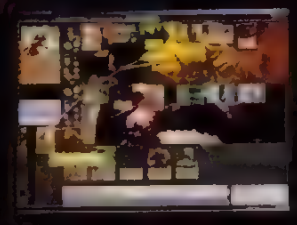
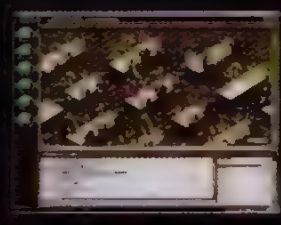
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## GI NEWS

# GOLDENEYE SEQUEL SURFACES

The 1997 release of **GoldenEye 007** for the **N64** marks the birth of what some consider the best first-person shooter in all of console gaming. The title was developed by **Rare**, who has since signed on with **Microsoft**. Now, however, holders of the Bond license **Electronic Arts** is going to resurrect the fabled franchise for **James Bond 007: GoldenEye 2**. The game will release this fall to all major systems.



Although gamers have loved stepping into the high falutin' shoes of secret agent James

Bond, **GoldenEye 2** will produce a twist. Players will take control of a villainous double-0 agent who's been kicked out of MI6 for "reckless brutality." Eventually you'll hook up with legendary Bond nemesis and Shirley Bassey muse Auric Goldfinger. Who knows, maybe 007 himself will be sent to take care of you.

In another twist, **GoldenEye 2** will be developed internally by EA's LA studio, and not **Free Radical** – a renowned FPS maker with members who had designed the original **GoldenEye**.

## THE CATWOMAN COMETH

We're still reeling from **Halle Berry's** topless scene in **Swordfish**, and we couldn't get enough of her swimsuit in **Die Another Day**. Now that she's showing her pussycat side in **Catwoman**, we're positively going to explode! **Electronic Arts** has picked up the rights to the summer blockbuster, and will release titles for major consoles at the same time.

The game will follow the storyline of the film, which shows the transformation of **Patience Phillips** after she is killed by her employer for uncovering a dark secret, as well as her resurrection and acquisition of super powers from a rare Egyptian cat. **Catwoman** features seven levels and offers the player acrobatic skills, the crack of her whip, a sixth sense, and more.

In other **Electronic Arts** comic-related news, the company says it is teaming up with **Marvel** to make a **Marvel Vs. EA** fighting game featuring heroes from both sides.



## THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

**UGLY** – Former **Nintendo** president **Hiroshi Yamauchi** officially declares there's no pressure on the dual-screen **Nintendo DS** handheld to be a hit, stating "If it succeeds, we rise to the heavens. If it fails, we sink into hell." He further went on to exclaim that people aren't interested in technologically flashy games or consoles. Thank you, peanut gallery.

**BETTER THAN GOOD** – Take your **Mario Party** and stuff it up your @\$\$\$. The appropriately named **Topheavy Studios** has come up with the party title we all want – a drinking/video game called **The Guy Game**. Not only does it feature trivia and minigames, but it also has FMV of spring break hotties who will even flash you for the big payoff.



**BAD** – **Gran Turismo 4** will be hitting stores a little later than we originally thought. **Sony** has set the official release date for this fall.

**INCARCERATED** – Sean Michael Breen has been sent to jail for four years due to his part in a video game pirating group called **Razor1911**. Breen and others fraudulently got hold of advance code of games like **WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos** and sold them.

**GOOD** – On Monday, May 10, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the LA Master Chorale will present the **Final Fantasy Symphony Concert** at the Walt Disney Concert hall in LA. Series composer **Nobuo Uematsu** has created the two-hour score, the first of its kind in the U.S. Ticket info will be announced at a later date.

**GOOD** – Former **Oingo Boingo** frontman and soundtrack maestro **Danny Elfman** (**Batman**, **The Simpsons**, **The Nightmare Before Christmas**) has signed on to write the theme for **Lionhead's Xbox RPG Fable**.

## LOOSE TALK

If loose lips are spraying hot video game gossip, we're sucking up the secret saliva and drooling it all over this section. Got a secret to tell? Email us at [loosetalk@gameinformer.com](mailto:loosetalk@gameinformer.com) and we'll be all ears.

**Loose Talk** has heard that **Capcom** was heartened by the critical success of **Viewtiful Joe** on the **GameCube** (despite poor sales). So, it has decided to bring it to wider audiences via the **PlayStation 2**. In fact, if this version of the game goes over well enough, the company will seriously consider making a sequel.

Last month we reported that **Namco** cancelled its **Dead to Rights** offshoot **Extreme Force: Grant City Anti-Crime**. The publisher assured everyone that things were just fine, however, with **Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay**. **Loose Talk** has heard otherwise. At least one of the project's senior members has walked due to creative differences regarding the game.

Meanwhile, analysts are expecting **Namco** to release the next iteration of fighting franchise **Tekken** before spring of next year.

According to the **Mercury News**, details on **Microsoft's Xbox Next** console have been leaked. The system will use three **IBM 64-bit** processors for more power than most computers and contain an **ATI** graphics chip capable of high-definition TV resolution. However, having backward compatibility with the original **Xbox** is in question.

**Sony** is currently hashing out more features for its **PlayStation Portable**. Connectivity with the **PS2** will be available and gamers can even save their spot on a PSP title and then continue it on the PS2 version of the game of the same name. Unfortunately, wireless networking and MP3 support may be on the chopping block.

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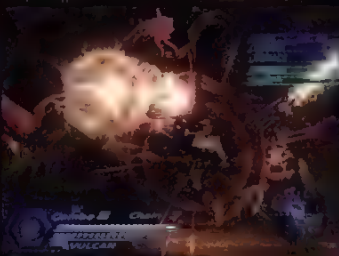
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PlayStation<sup>®</sup>2



TRIVIA

Video games are great toys, but we love toys of all kinds, and we're sure that you do too. But not every cool plaything actually makes it to the market. Take our trivia challenge and see how your wickedness compares to the coolness of these unreleased toys.

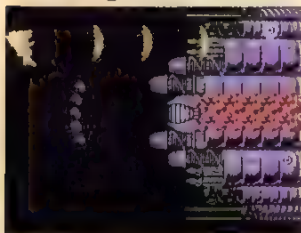
**Question 1: What did Ralph Wiggum once call Superintendent Chalmers?**

- A. Super International Cricket
- B. Super Mario Chalmers
- C. Super Nintendo Chalmers
- D. Super Duper Chooper



**Question 2: What is the name of the game pictured below?**

- A. Dragon Spirit
- B. Legendary Wings
- C. Super Star Soldier
- D. Blazing Lazars



**Question 3: One of these "King of Queens" stars voiced a character in Sierra's popular CD-ROM adventure Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Father. Who was it?**

- A. Kevin James
- B. Leah Remini
- C. Nicole Sullivan
- D. Jerry Stiller

**Question 4: What was the sequel to Smash TV called?**

- A. Smash TV 2: 2 Fast, 2 Furious
- B. Loaded
- C. Total Carnage
- D. Super Smash TV



**Question 5: What is the name of the murderous villain in the original Clock Tower game for PSOne?**

- A. Scissorman
- B. Quaid
- C. Senor Slicey
- D. Pickaxe

**Question 6: To date, how many games have Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen starred in?**

- A. 4
- B. 6
- C. 7
- D. 9



**Question 7: Which revered Japanese company was actually founded by an American named Dave Rosen?**

- A. Sony
- B. Namco
- C. Taito
- D. Sega

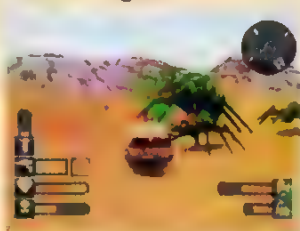
**Question 8: Which villain is featured exclusively in the Xbox version of the Spider-Man: The Movie game?**

- A. Kraven the Hunter
- B. Mysterio
- C. Paste Pot Pete
- D. The Lizard



**Question 9: For which system was Midway's Body Harvest released?**

- A. Sega Saturn
- B. PSone
- C. Nintendo 64
- D. Atari Jaguar



**Question 10: Which of these games features a villain named Evil the Cat?**

- A. Toejam and Earl in Panic on Funkotron
- B. Earthworm Jim
- C. Whiplash
- D. Metal Arms: Glitch in the System



...BUT I PLAY ONE ON TV

In March, UPN is debuting a new CGI-animated series called **Game Over**. It follows the adventures of the Smashenburns – a family of video game characters living their everyday lives once you turn your console off. The first episode alone features references to **Crash Bandicoot**, **Grand Theft Auto**, and even transvestites.

*Game Over* was created by former **Simpsons** writer David Sacks, and features the voices of **Patrick Warburton** (*The Tick*, Puddy from *Seinfeld*), **Lucy Liu**, and **Rachel Dratch** (*Saturday Night Live*). The show will air on Wednesdays on UPN.

CRITERION COVERT OPS

**Criterion Games** is moving into the first-person shooter genre by cover of night. The creators of the **Burnout** driving sensation and middleware technology are sneaking around with a new covert counter-terrorism operation simply called **Black**. The **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** title should appear in 2005, and claims to contain some unique gameplay mechanics. We could tell you about them, but then we'd have to kill you.



BREAKDOWN

**20%** Sony reported an operating profit fall of 20% due to slowdown in PS2 sales and a slump in the box office

**11.9%** of sales for 2003 were mature-rated, according to the NPD Group. This is down from 13.2% in 2002

**100%** of the wardrobe malfunctions in the office were planned

**7%** of respondents to *Game Developer's* 2004 salary survey of the industry were female. The study found that women make, on average, 87.4 cents for every dollar a man makes

**90%** of people named Jeremy deny being Furries

Score & Rank



0-2

Reiner Pez Dispenser



3-4

Todd McFarlane's "People I Saw Outside Today" Action Figures



5-6

Rabid Animal Crossing Dolls



7-8

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre Dress-up Playset



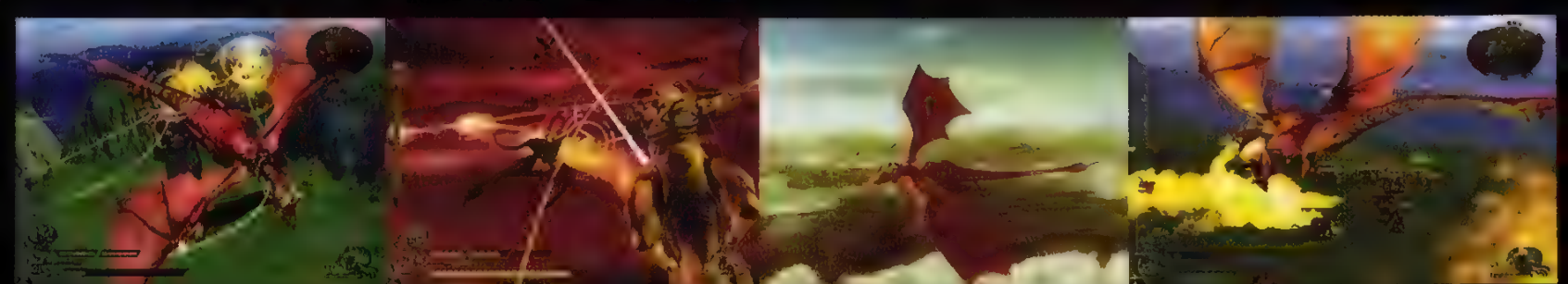
9-10

Plush Rappin' ODB Doll





# Death from Above



Rain destruction on your foes from the back of a flying, fire-breathing dragon.  
Dogfight airborne enemies in 360 degrees within massive environments.



## NEW FREE RADICAL SHOOTER IN SIGHT

*TimeSplitters*' developer **Free Radical** is free from its former partnership with **Eidos**, and it's taking no time to expand its horizons. The company has announced **Second Sight**, a shooter for the **PlayStation 2**, **Xbox**, and **GameCube**. The late 2004 title centers around an amnesiac patient of a secret U.S. medical facility who is only beginning to understand the tremendous psychic power available to him.

Director of Free Radical, **David Doak**, says, "*Second Sight* realizes our ambitions to create [an] exciting, fresh IP [intellectual property] and innovate in a new genre. It brings together great gameplay and a compelling story – everyone at Free Radical is really excited about this one."



## 9 OUT OF 10 DENTISTS RECOMMEND THE JAGUAR

A California company has turned a piece of gaming history into better teeth! **Imagin Systems Corporation** manufacture the **HotRod** – a new "interoral" camera that helps dentists probe into your mouth to get the best view of your teeth for cleaning. As you can see, almost the entire unit is based on **Atari's Jaguar** console. **Imagin** bought out the remaining units of the failed console in the mid-1990s, and have since adapted the system for its own use.

While we loved playing **Tempest 2000** back in the day, it's hard to argue with **HotRod's** anti-fog lens tip and lightweight, anti-torque cable. And what about the convenient handle (take that **GameCube!**)? Gaming is god here at *Game Informer*, but we also have a motto: "If you don't have your health, what do you have?" Besides, we simply like the name **HotRod** better!

Maybe other medical companies will follow suit. Might we see a **Dreamcast**-inspired home surgery kit?



It's official: Video games make for good dental hygiene

## DATA FILE

➤ **NBA Street** developer **NuFX** has officially been purchased by **Electronic Arts**. The studio is currently working on an undisclosed new project. **NBA Street Vol. 3** is expected to come out in 2005. In other news from the company, soccer game **UEFA Euro 2004** will appear this summer to commemorate the tournament, while **The Sims 2** and **Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault** won't appear until fall at the earliest.

➤ The April 20 DVD release of the surfing documentary **Step Into Liquid** will – for the first time ever in a DVD – feature a free video game. The set's special disc will contain the full PC edition of **Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer** from **Activision**.

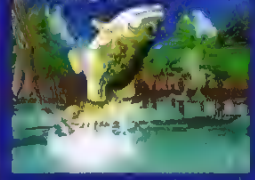
➤ PC MMORPG **Mythica** has been cancelled by **Microsoft Game Studios** so that it can focus on the other MMORPG in its stable. We suspect that title is the one by **Sigil Games** – the company founded by two of the brains behind **EverQuest** – **Brad McQuaid** and **Jeff Butler**.

➤ The makers of **Arx Fatalis**, **Arkane Studios**, have licensed the **Source Engine** from **Valve** for its **Half-Life 2** PC game for an upcoming project. Which title will come out first?

➤ **Ubisoft** has postponed the releases of the **PlayStation 2** and **GameCube** versions of **Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow** until an unspecified time.

➤ **Sega's** leadership has quietly changed hands, leaving **Sammy** president **Hajime Satomi** as chairman of the home of **Sonic** after **Sammy** acquired **Sega** last fall.

➤ In an interesting twist to the "fish genre" of video games, the **Sega's WOW Entertainment** studio has developed a title called **Fish: Legend of Seven Waters and Gods**, where you star as a fish trying to find an herb to cure sick children. Along the way you must survive traps, predators, and a scary bat.



➤ **Codemasters** is bringing back the beats in **MTV Music Generator 3: This is the Remix**. The **PS2** and **Xbox** game allows you to remix songs from **Snoop Dogg**, **OutKast**, **Carl Cox**, and more (including the ability to use samples from your own CD collection), as well as create your own songs.

Name That Game Answer: Techno's Deception



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# THE RETURN



# FAB FOUR

# OF SONY'S COVER STORY



**N**aughty Dog and Insomniac Games have a long history together. Both companies helped establish the platformer as a leading genre on the original PlayStation (with the Crash Bandicoot and Spyro the Dragon series, respectively); both abandoned the characters they had made into international gaming icons after very public splits with Universal Interactive; and both have helped to take the genre as a

more mature, combat-oriented direction on the PlayStation 2. Now, both development houses are working on the third installment of their successful PS2 franchises: Jak 3 and Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal.

With so many accomplishments already behind them, Naughty Dog and Insomniac are aiming for gaming immortality; Naughty Dog by continuing its goal of creating vast, open worlds teeming with life and variety; Insomniac

by perfecting its formula of high-powered gunplay while expanding the horizons of the genre to include online play. Simply put, both of these titles are looking absolutely amazing, and Game Informer was lucky enough to secure an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the development of both products. In these next few pages, fans will get a glimpse of what the future holds for these two amazing franchises.



SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

# JAK 3

**F**or a gamer, stepping into Naughty Dog's plush new Santa Monica headquarters is the equivalent of Charlie entering the chocolate factory. The atmosphere is absolutely abuzz with excitement for video games. The talent that walks the halls is a showcase of the industry's finest, and you continually find yourself contemplating whether

or not you should create a distraction so that you can sneak off and tinker with this studio's 50-inch plasma screens and incredible array of technology.

The team seems confident. Even lead programmer Andy Gavin's canine pal, Osiris, is unnaturally energetic. Either there's something in the water or something truly wondrous is at

work here. It's not until you see Jak 3 that you understand where this team's charge is coming from. Naughty Dog is not just creating another sequel. It's pioneering in a way that no developer has attempted before. As Naughty Dog's co-founder Jason Rubin so elegantly puts it, "Jak 3 is going to surprise a lot of people."

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG ■ **RELEASE** FALL

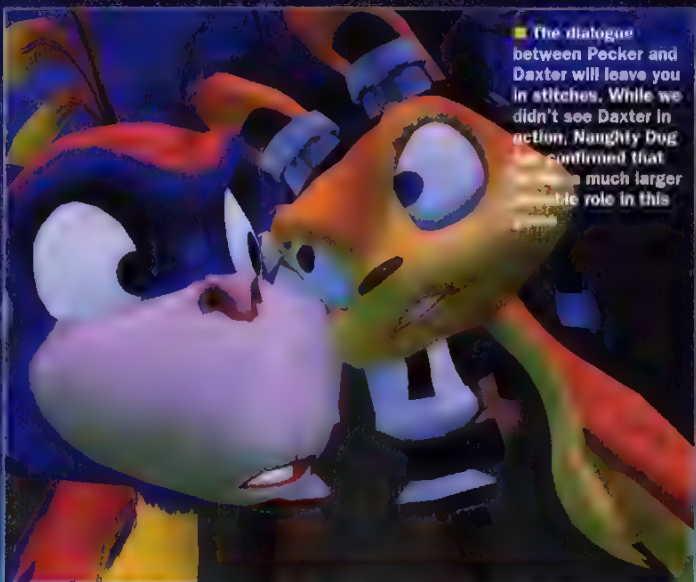




■ The story doesn't lose a beat between Jak II and Jak 3. You'll be brought up to speed on the events at hand very quickly



■ And in one sudden blink of the eye, the city is forever changed



■ The dialogue between Pecker and Daxter will leave you in stitches. While we didn't see Daxter in action, Naughty Dog confirmed that he'll play a much larger role in this



■ Jak is banished for life to the wasteland

Games like Final Fantasy are fueled by strong performances from its core characters. After investing 100 plus hours into one of these games and the credits start to role, you feel as though you are saying goodbye to a part of your family. The emotional bond that is formed is immeasurable. However, in saying goodbye, you really are parting with these characters for the last time. There hasn't been a series that has shown true growth within its characters from one installment to the next. Certainly, we've seen heroes blossom from village outcasts to saviors of the world, but we've never really seen them grow emotionally or physically. Outside of giving characters new outfits and weapons, the roles in each sequel that we play are basically the same.

Naughty Dog is bucking this trend. When Jak II hit the streets, you couldn't help but gasp in disbelief. Not only did it display a great departure in gameplay style, it showed true growth within its characters. Jak was no longer the happy-go-lucky kid that we had first been introduced to. He had aged significantly and showed true signs of emotional damage. The way that the story displayed this transition was a bit outlandish. The party was sucked into a wormhole, and before you could even come to terms with what was happening, several years had passed.

With Jak 3, the character development is even more pronounced. Rather than warping into the future yet again or moving the characters into a new region, this story picks up right where the last tale left off. Even

though Jak saved the day, all is not well in his world.

As the scorching heat of the sun produces a blinding sheen across an expansive desert, a small transport approaches. It screams through the humid air into the distant haze, and you get a good look at the enormity of this barren wasteland. The sensation sinks in that it may, in fact, go on forever. In a clearing, the shuttle touches down and Jak emerges with a scowl on his face and his hands firmly cuffed in front of him. A squad of Crimson Guards marches Jak down to the desert floor as Daxter and Pecker (the wisecracking bird from the last game) exchange insults. It's at this point that we learn that Jak is banished to the desert for life because of his crimes against the city and its people. As the trio begins its

slow march into the expansive emptiness, we hear a voice warn, "Prove yourself worthy or the desert will be your grave." Baking under the intense heat and tiring from his trek through the wasteland thus far, Jak begins to hallucinate. All is not well.

It's at this point that the story transitions to Haven City. To much surprise, it is under attack. Troops are everywhere, and explosions light up the sky. Within seconds, the palace that once stood high and mighty above its people is rocked with blasts and topples over onto the city below. It's a magnificent spectacle, but also great foreshadowing that this game is going to be one wild ride. The battle for the city has just begun.

■ The dune buggies feature realistic physics and are a blast to drive.



As luck would have it, Jak and company eventually run into a band of deserters and others that have been banished from Haven City. Although the surroundings don't produce the best of living conditions, these people have found a way to survive, and have joined together to create Spargus City. This dwelling is but a fraction of the size of Haven and is mostly absent of technology. It has the visual flair of *Star Wars'* Mos Espa and the rowdy personality of *Mad Max*. Spargus' citizens know how to take care of themselves. Therefore, there is no law enforcement and no guards to contend with if you "accidentally" assault someone.

Given the enormity of the wasteland (it's five times as large as Haven City), accessible transportation is a necessity. The sleek hovercraft of Haven are nowhere to be found, and there is really no fast way across the desert. The villagers rely specifically on two means to make their journeys. The most common is a large bipedal lizard species called leapers. As its name implies, a leaper can launch high into the air, and can even use its small winged arms to temporarily flutter. Wastelanders who are more fortunate drive dune buggies. Unlike the hovercraft in the previous game, none of the buggies are randomly generated. "Each of these vehicles is unique," adds Rubin. "Specific characters in the game built them. They all have different physics and weapons."

Jak, of course, will eventually be able to travel by both of these means. The dune buggies are swift and fueled by an amazing physics engine. While many complained that the hovercraft controls in *Jak II* were too frustrating, riding in a buggy feels absolutely right. It's something that you can relate to, and Naughty Dog has made it incredibly fun. Not only will you use these vehicles to launch across the wasteland sand dunes and reach new destinations, missions are being created especially for them. With each of the buggies comes different gameplay. For instance, one is decked out with a machine gun on its roof. Rather than just having this firearm lock on to targets, Naughty Dog designed controls that allow players to manually target...even while driving. Thus, if enemies approach from the sides, you won't have to reposition the vehicle. You can simply mow them down by pivoting the gun.

Similar to Haven City, the majority of the wasteland is open to players from the outset, but it can often be a dangerous place to traverse. As Naughty Dog's game director Evan Wells describes, "There are people in the desert who are not even welcome into Spargus City. They are basically the banished banished." From what we hear, these marauders fancy your vehicles and weapons.

While it would seem as though this sequel could best be summed up as the *Beyond Thunderdome* edition, the wasteland is just a portion of the



■ Much like the hovercraft in *Jak II*, the buggy is equipped with a jump button.



■ On this buggy, the machine gun targeting is controlled by the user.

game. "Roughly 50 percent of the game takes place in or around Haven City," comments Wells. "As you'll see, the city has changed completely. What we're doing here is very different." As war wages on, you'll gain access to regions of the city bit by bit, and will even explore the ruins of the great palace that has wiped out half of the city. Given the current state of events in Haven, this environment will mostly feel foreign to players.

"[In *Jak II*] the city was too large with too little to do," adds Rubin. "It was the first game that we did where things like traffic were random. We couldn't tune it the same way we did with a standard character action game. We didn't know how much traffic would come because the traffic is spontaneously generated. We didn't know how many guards were going to come. We had no idea what was going to happen. We thought the city needed

to be huge. It ended up being too huge. There was too much traversing in it. It was also a city that was hard to balance. We were doing things we had never done before with random gameplay. In *Jak 3*, we've learned from our mistakes and addressed these issues. What used to be a gigantic city that was basically the same — you just ran around and bumped into someone then the cops would come — is now significantly smaller because of the waste area. In some areas of the city, no matter what you do, you are constantly under attack because you are invading the Crimson Guard or Metalheads sections. There are no vehicles, no police, none of that stuff in these areas. The city is totally different. You're in there for a reason or you're being stupid. You're not just roaming aimlessly. We broke the city down. It's smaller, and much more manageable. It's a whole new experience."





Each shot from the Vulcan Fury's third upgrade closes in on an enemy



As the story develops and the player progresses through the game, time will pass in Jak's world. The transition in years is done much more subtly than before and actually ties into the events at hand. From a visual perspective, Jak now bears the physique of someone you'd guess is in his early 20s. Along with a new haircut (which Naughty Dog originally envisioned as a military-esque buzz cut), and new garments, Jak's personality is much different. He's definitely wiser, not so hot-tempered, and very much focused on the events at hand. "Jak is right in the middle," says Naughty Dog's creative director Dan Arey. "He's the bridge for the future."

With his rugged new look, Jak will now command a much larger arsenal of weapons. Each of the four weapons from Jak II can be upgraded twice. The way that Naughty Dog has incorporated this newfound power is very interesting. Just like the last game, you can switch weapons on the fly by hitting right, left, up, or down on the directional pad. When you acquire a specific upgrade for a gun, you simply need to double or triple-tap in that weapon's designated direction. With the standard blaster, if you double tap, your bullets will

ricochet off of any surface and usually find an enemy. If you triple-tap, the gun will send out a flying disc that spins through the air and rains lasers on any adversary in the nearby area. With the Vulcan Fury, the level two upgrade produces a stream of lightning that fries foes, and level three allows players to fire off a flurry of heat-seeking shots. Of course, each new upgrade is more powerful than the last, but there's a sacrifice – they suck up ammo all the faster. To counter the firepower that gamers now have at their fingertips, the enemies are stronger, smarter, and in far greater numbers. You'll often find yourself unloading countless rounds into seemingly never-ending swarms.

As if you didn't have enough firepower at your disposal, Jak can once again lose control and transform into a dark, hulking behemoth that, with but a press of the button, will make quick work of any foe. "Jak can also



For the first time in the series, enemy bodies feature realistic rag doll physics

use light power abilities," says Wells. "It's not like Dark Jak where you have to collect anything to use it. You get the full power at once."

When Jak taps into the light power, a magnificent transformation takes place. His skin glows in a blinding electric blue, his eyes disappear into whiteness, and massive wings stem from his back. As you can imagine, Jak can launch into the air and use the wings to glide great distances. He can also emit an energy shield around him to repel enemy attacks. "You can actually become invincible when in the

shield," adds Rubin. "You only have a certain amount of Light Jak power, so you have to use it wisely."

When Jak takes damage, the light can also be tapped to perform a regeneration move that gives the player hit points. As Arey points out, "The universe that we've built is sort of a balance of Dark Eco and Light Eco. Jak has been exposed to both. This is another example of him being caught right in the middle between the dark and light. He's the ying and yang."

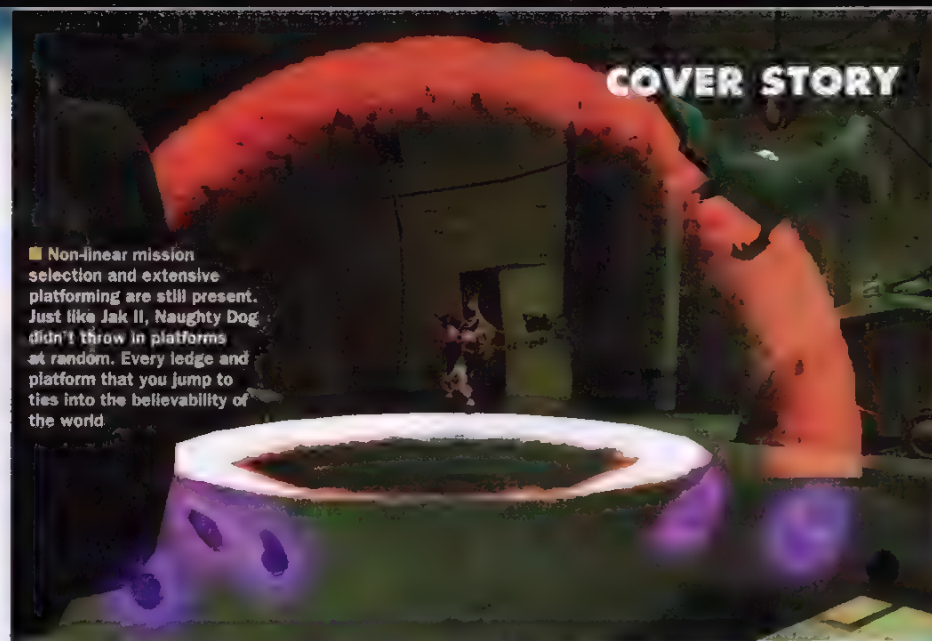
“We think what we’re doing now is very much like an action movie,” states Rubin. “You have characters, call them the *Die Hard* characters, and you are familiar with them. The Bruce Willis character and the cop character have personalities, strong personalities. Every new exploration that they go out on has totally different things that happen. If an action movie has a chase scene, you don’t say, ‘Oh that action movie is now a car movie.’ They just happen to be in a chase scene. That’s what makes sense at that time. Likewise, we have a desert, we have vehicles, but we’re not a desert vehicle game. It’s just what happens during that point of the story that drives our familiar characters into unfamiliar territory. So instead of just putting the same characters in new missions, we put the characters in a world that’s full of different things to do. We’re making an action movie.

Everything you do ties in with the plot. We’re totally modeling our game after that action movie experience where you never know what the next thing that you need to do is, and you never know the next situation. That’s where we’ve taken this series.”

If the story calls for Jak to fly in a Hellicat cruiser over the city (which you’ll get the chance to do!), Naughty Dog is creating gameplay that fits into this scenario. You never really know what to expect from this game, the plot, or the characters that you meet. New faces will

befriend you, your closest companions may perish, and when all is said and done, you’ll finally have a solid understanding of the Precursors – an ancient civilization that has been

■ Non-linear mission selection and extensive platforming are still present. Just like *Jak II*, Naughty Dog didn’t throw in platforms at random. Every ledge and platform that you jump to ties into the believability of the world.



shrouded in secrecy since the first game. From what we’ve seen of this trilogy-ending sequel, compelling characters and a cohesive blend between gameplay and story are pos-

sible in video games. If Naughty Dog accomplishes what it hopes to do with *Jak 3*, this could very well be the title that breaks the standard video game mold. **A+**

■ As the game progresses, Jak will obtain new armors that reward him with hit point bonuses.



# RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL



***INTO THE FUTURE  
OF PLATFORMING***

All games strive for perfection; a precious few achieve this rarified status. Insomniac Games, a company that has done as much to advance the action/platform genre as any has, finds itself in a position to accomplish the goal it has spent all 10 years of its existence in pursuit of: creating the perfect platformer.

Although Ted Price, Insomniac's president and CEO, would probably scoff at the notion, his company (along with its sometimes partners and close friends at Naughty Dog) finds itself, for the first time, in a clear leadership position in its chosen field. After years of seeking to emulate the genius of Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto, who single-handedly created the platformer with Super Mario Bros., Insomniac's last project, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando was almost universally acknowledged as this

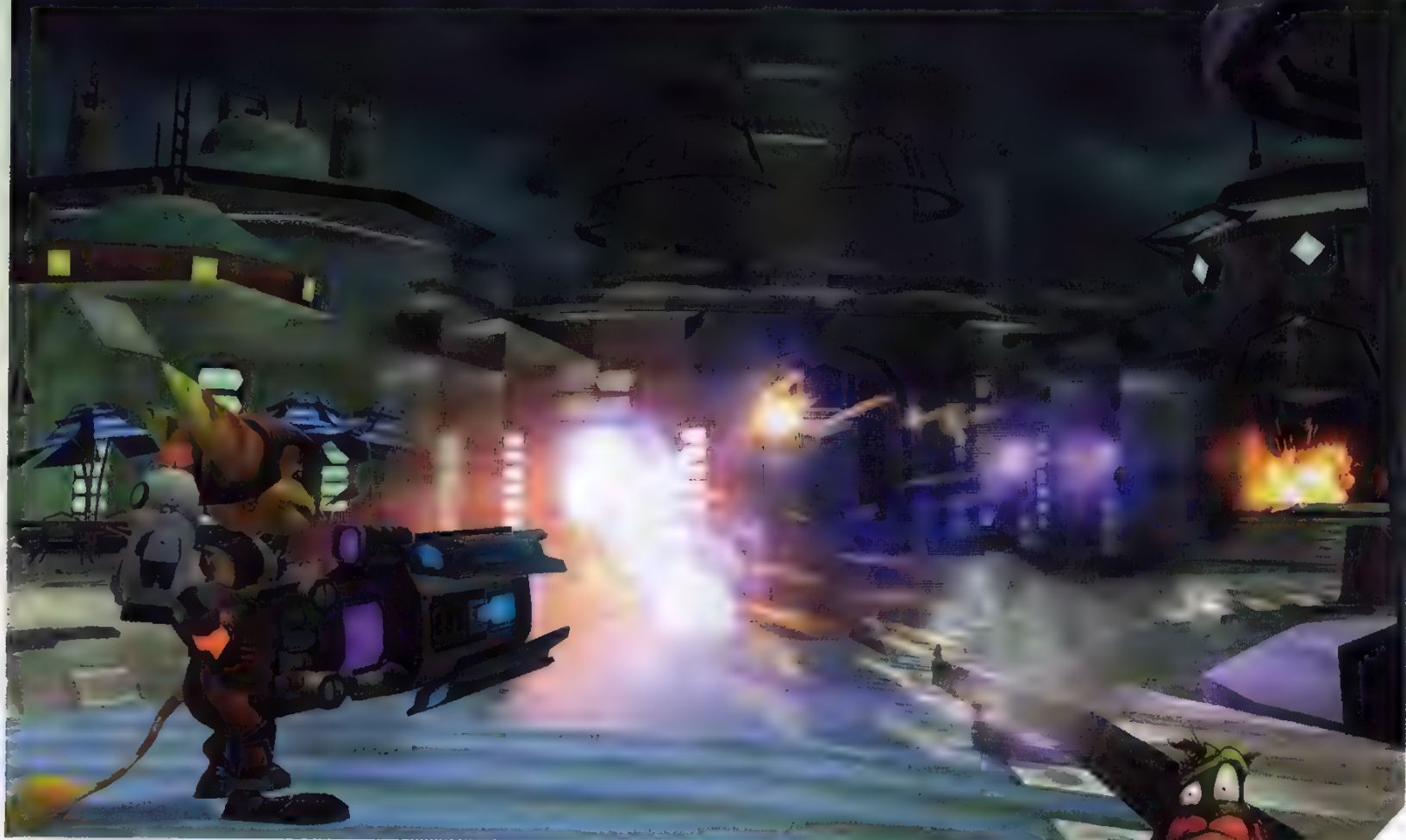
generation's best platformer, garnering six press awards for PlayStation 2 Game of the Year, seven awards for Best Action/Platform Game, and three reader and editor's choice awards. Recently, it was announced that it is also nominated for the prestigious Game of the Year prize at the annual Interactive Achievement Awards. This critical success helped propel the game to an impressive 1.2 million units sold worldwide.

While many doubted if the company could top the ultra-successful Spyro the Dragon

series (which it left behind after a very public parting with Universal Interactive, who owned the rights to the brand name), Ratchet & Clank may well be the series that stands as the company's landmark achievement. It's certainly gone a long way towards bringing the platformer into the 21st century, with a deadly, addictive mix of insane weaponry, amazing graphics, and diverse gameplay.

While some might wonder if Insomniac might be running short of ideas for this third iteration of the series, Price

says they are only getting started. "I think that at the end of Ratchet 2, people were still bursting with ideas," he observes. "With this universe, anything goes, so it's easy to come up with weapons that break the mold. If we were doing a World War II first-person shooter, we'd be really restricted in what we use. People here are really attuned to coming up with the wackiest ideas they can; that's what makes this franchise fun for us, and that's why we don't run out of ideas."



Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal seeks to further the saga of our two beloved heroes, and begins by introducing a new wrinkle into their relationship. This time around, it seems that Clank (who, let's admit, is just plain cooler than Ratchet) is finally getting the chance to step out from under the shadow of his furry friend.

After once again saving the galaxy in *Going Commando*, the duo has been given their own holovid series. However, much to the consternation of Ratchet, the producers have taken a liking to Clank, and have thus made him the star of the show, now titled *Secret Agent Clank*, reducing Ratchet to mere sidekick status. In fact, Clank now finds himself a superstar of sorts, and is frequently recognized by fans and passersby throughout the course of the game, much to the chagrin of Ratchet. As sad-sack genius Morrissey once noted, "We hate it when our friends become successful." Rest assured that this new struggle of egos will be used to great comic effect.

The increased focus on Clank as a character was a conscious decision on the part of Insomniac. Brad

Santos, the game's screenwriter and cinematics director explains, "Clank is a great character. People responded really well to the Clank missions in the last game, so we wanted to give him more solo time. One of the ways we do that is with the *Secret Agent Clank* subplot – now Clank is this intergalactic celebrity, lots of people recognize him from the holovid, and the way that this is woven into the gameplay is very clever and I think people will get a kick out of it."

Of course, the pair will have to put away their differences, as they are once again called to thwart a grave threat to universal peace, which comes this time in the form of Dr. Nefarious, a "maniacal robotic villain" intent on destroying all organic life in the universe. Employing the Tyhrnoids, a race of multi-eyed aliens who have been brainwashed (ironically) to wipe out their fellow organics. In response, the galactic president has formed the Q-Force, a fighting unit with the mission to destroy Nefarious and his minions. In addition to Ratchet and Clank, the infamous Captain Qwark, whom we learn has crossed paths with Nefarious in the past, heads the Q-Force. Qwark has always been

a source of humor in the Ratchet & Clank universe, but this time around Santos promises, "We get to see a different side of Qwark, and by the end of the game, people will have a whole different view of who he is."

In addition to Qwark, other old favorites making a return include Helga, Ratchet's burly personal trainer and Big Al, the proprietor of the Robo Shack. Of course, several new characters are also introduced, most notably Sasha, who Santos characterizes as a "female Han Solo," the captain of the Starship Phoenix, daughter of the galactic president, and Ratchet's new love interest. Another key addition to the cast will be Lawrence, Nefarious's acerbic robotic butler, whose dry wit and British accent is reminiscent of Jeffrey from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. The plot has been conceived not only to tell a tale that is, in the words of Santos, going to "shock some people, particularly big fans of the series," but also one that will lend a



As you can see, Captain Qwark goes through some major changes throughout the course of *Up Your Arsenal*

sense of urgency to the proceedings and incorporate a wider variety of gameplay.

Although the team remains tight-lipped as to just what some of these new features are, they have promised that "there are missions that are unique and unlike anything you've played in the first two games."



For one, it appears that vehicles may be used for more than just racing this time around, as we saw a level where Ratchet was piloting an ATV-type craft that somewhat resembled a heavily armored pod racer from *The Phantom Menace*.

There are some changes to the basic structure of the game as well. The Q-Force now operates from a home base, in this case the Starship Phoenix. On the Phoenix, Ratchet will be able to undergo training, receive new missions, and purchase ammo and weapons. This was done to streamline the gameplay experience. In the words of Brian Allgeier, "Whenever a player wants something new, they can always travel to the Phoenix. You don't have to wonder, 'Where was that armor vendor in that one level?'"

On the technology side, changes are being implemented to improve what is already considered one of the best game engines ever created. In the past, Insomniac and Naughty Dog have shared technology (and both *Jak 3* and *Up Your Arsenal* still use the same core engine), but this time around the developers have gone their separate ways, as the two series have now diverged to the point where

the technical foundations require a vast degree of customization.

One of the more obvious improvements is the addition of reflective textures. On a new level on Planet Florana (a jungle planet reminiscent of Endor) we observed a light-catching sheen on the domed windows that dotted the various elevated huts in the environment. Also apparent was the significant work that had gone into improving the game's explosive and particle effects – which were fairly amazing to begin with. Put it this way: One of the best-looking PS2 games in existence is only getting prettier with age.

Yes, graphics are always an easy way to excite the fans in the cheap seats, but sometimes it's important to take a look at what's going on beneath the surface. As Ratchet & Clank, more than any platformer in the past, places a premium on hectic gun battles and frenzied action, Insomniac is also working on overhauling the enemy AI. At this point, they feel they have accomplished something that no other game in its genre has ever attempted: truly intelligent NPCs that can gather information about the environments and events unfolding



Look closely and you can see new reflective effects on the domed window surfaces

around them.

This complex behavior began as an exercise conducted at the end of the production schedule. In the hope of cutting down the time it took to place and set AI routines for enemies, programmer Tony Garcia attempted a bold experiment. "I would put an enemy on one end of the level and Ratchet on the other end and see if the enemy could find his way through," recalls Garcia. "It took a couple of weeks, but eventually I got

it where – without any set-up at all or telling him anything about the environment he was in – he was climbing walls and jumping over pits and scaling cliffs and things like that."

This intuitive behavior has drastically reduced the time required to set up enemies and obstacles, which Garcia claims will allow the designers and programmers the luxury of creating even more ambitious and complex combat sequences and levels.



Enemy encounters will be denser and more difficult thanks to the improved AI system



You'll need all the firepower you can get when facing down huge enemies like this



Ratchet & Clank essentially introduced weapons as a staple of the platforming genre, and no other series has come close to matching either the number or quality of Insomniac's wildly creative armaments. While we do expect that some of our favorite implements of destruction will be returning, much of the excitement in anticipating a new Ratchet & Clank game comes from dreaming about what sorts of strange and wonderful guns and gadgets will be placed in our digital paws.

While Insomniac was hesitant to reveal too many of the secrets regarding Up Your Arsenal's arsenal, they did introduce us to a few of the weapons that are making their way into the game.

"We got a lot of feedback from fans on how they like the more exotic weapons like the Suck Cannon, the Bouncer, and the Agents of Doom," recalls Brian Allgeier. To this end, the team is focusing on weapons that operate well outside of the conventional plasma rifles and lasers that

are the focus of most science-fiction themed titles.

One the more unique example we saw was the Rift Inducer, a device that actually creates small black holes that suck enemies into a void. Seeing it in action is amazing, and as it grows more powerful you'll be able to combine multiple vortexes to form larger holes.

Taking another cue from the role-playing genre (which inspired the way Ratchet gained hit points and weapons evolved over time based on experience), the team has concocted the Infector, another more esoteric armament that functions much like a poison spell in an RPG. Although a poison attack was available as a purchased upgrade in Going Commando, the Infector takes this already cool effect to next level. The weapon sprays a green, bubbly gas at enemies, which gradually begins to infect them (just how long this takes depends on the enemy's total hit points). Once infected, they will continue to lose hit points over time until the inevitable end.



The Refractor adds a puzzle element into the real-time game world, and can also be used as a defensive shield and weapon

At this point, the disease takes over, causing enemies to ooze sticky bubbles and attack their own kind in hopes of spreading the infection. In this way, the Infector can be a very effective tactical tool, allowing you to take out whole rooms full of adversaries with the use of limited ammo.

The weapon upgrade system has also been expanded, allowing for more frequent and greater transformations. In Going Commando, each weapon evolved only once during the first play-through, but in Up Your Arsenal they will change multiple times. However, each new form will have essentially the same basic functionality as the original, unlike last time when the liquid-spewing Lava Gun became the

much more pedestrian Meteor Gun. Taking this into account, the upgrades will largely focus on increased ammo capacity, range, power, and more spectacular particle effects.

Ratchet's palette is not limited to only weapons. As before, a number of gadgets will aid in unlocking doors, traversing platforms, and solving puzzles. One such device is the Refractor, which can be used to bend and direct laser beams found within the levels. By aligning them to hit certain targets in the environments, Ratchet will be able to get past force fields or access new areas and platforms. Also, in a first for the series, this gadget can also be used as a weapon, allowing



“Those damn Ewoks can’t hide forever!”

you to reflect enemies’ beam attacks back at them.

So far, *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* sounds like a standard-issue (if extremely well done) sequel: more of what you like made better, alongside some new twists to keep things fresh. However, Insomniac wasn’t content with just maintaining the status quo – the team is also taking on the incredible task of bringing the series’ storied gameplay into the online arena. Needless to say, this plan has presented a host of challenges.

“[We’re trying] to bring Insomniac, which is traditionally a single-player development house, into the multiplayer world. It wasn’t an easy job. Everything in the game is [based around] single-player – everything had to be rewritten,” observes software engineer Scott Reeser.

The game will include a number of multiplayer modes, available for up to eight players online and up to four players in split-screen. One of the main game types the designers are focusing on are capture the base missions, in which you and your teammates attempt to take an enemy stronghold with the use of the outrageous weapons that have proven so popular throughout the history of the series. Of course, the team wants to ensure that the online experience is every bit as deep and compelling as the solo missions; so it’s also incorporating elements of teamwork and strategy in the form of vehicles, which allows one player to pilot while his comrade mans the gun turret. You can also command drones, bipedal robots that can follow you into battle much like the Synthenoids in *Going Commando*.

On paper, it certainly seems like a recipe for online success. Wedding team-based network play to the over-the-top, comic weapon designs that Insomniac is known for opens up the possibility for combat much more dynamic and unpredictable than those in more realistic, military games like *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*. Given the company’s track record of creating quality, well-engineered products, we have little doubt that *Up Your Arsenal* will help bring online multiplayer to a much broader audience. Especially if they confirm our suspicions and open up the online play to include the arena battles and racing. Unfortunately, the team would make no official comment on any multiplayer modes beyond capture the base.

In addition to providing the game with a new level of replay value, the team also claims that this initiative will put them in a position to capitalize on the inevitable online future of gaming. When we asked about the possibility of two-player online cooperative play in a platformer, Insomniac vice president of programming Brian Hastings jumped at the question, stating, “I think that’s the next step, [but] it’s not really something we’re ready to embrace right now. I don’t know of anyone that’s doing it right now, but it’s definitely possible. We love co-op and we see it as the next step in a lot of ways, I think someday the platformer is going to go in that direction.”

Scott Reeser added, “To add to that, some of the foundation on the technical side with what we’re doing with multiplayer online now, I think it will get us on the right path to doing that sort of stuff in the future.”

It’s comments like that which should help put an end to any proclamations



Both online and offline multiplayer will add a new dimension to the *Ratchet & Clank* experience

that the platformer is nearing the end of its existence as a vital genre in video games. With any luck, the next generation of console systems will open the doors to online gameplay that would have been deemed nearly impossible but a few years ago.

After *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando* proved to be one of the best gaming experiences of 2003, our expectations are running almost impossibly high. In talking with the team, one gets the feeling that they are feeling the pressure as well, and are responding with what they claim will be their best work yet. Although Insomniac is pushing for innovations on all fronts – particularly in the area of online – it hasn’t forgotten the finely tuned gameplay that is the heart of what makes the series so great to begin with.

“Some companies fall victim to what we call ‘sequelitis,’” comments Brian Algeier. “They’ll try to shove in all these one-offs and minigames, and the developers will ignore the foundation of what made the previous games

fun. But, we’re building on that.”

Adding credence to this claim, Ted Price pointed out that, in spite of all the effort that is going into the multiplayer aspects of the title, the single-player game is actually going to be significantly larger and more varied than its predecessor. Even better, some of the less-polished aspects of the gameplay – specifically the less-than-stellar space fighter combat that stopped *Going Commando* just short of achieving perfection – are being overhauled based on feedback from fans, focus groups, and the design team itself.

Armed with some of the most respected programmers and game designers in the industry, a seemingly limitless creativity, and the desire to make *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* (in the words of Brian Algeier) simply “bigger, better, and more badass” than its predecessor; we have every faith that Insomniac is going to deliver a game that stands among the best PlayStation 2 titles of 2004.

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PlayStation 2



**BILL GATES:**  
Nudie Pictures  
Inside!

**BREAKING NEWS**  
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**World Exclusive Look At The Plumbers' M-Rated Title**

UNLITTED EYEZ ISSUE 132

U.S. Chicken Ring Canada eh?



APRIL 2004

P A R O D Y

# EDITOR'S FORUM



**LORD GANNADON**  
gangsta-dan@gameminfarcer.com  
EDITOR, VIDEO GAME PROPHET

## WORD TO YOUR MOTHER

Hey, what's up, home slices? It is I, the lord of all that is wicked and awesome, and I'm crying out for peace within the video game community, yo. I hear a lot of you hatin' on one system or another, saying PS2 is the bomb, the 'Cube is for punks, Xbox is radical, and all that. But I don't play that. You know why? Cause I have all three, plus twelve more systems you haven't even heard about yet! Woot! And I even got a private room at my mom's house to play them in. Represent! It's always bumpin' at my crib, you know what I'm sayin'? That's right, surround sound, baby. I have, like, Dolby Pro Logic IV 92.1. My entire room is one big speaker! So you shouldn't waste your time fighting about which system is best, cause they're all inferior to my top-secret game paradise! Word up. All you PS2, 'Cube, and 'Box fanboys should chill and just play your little games. You'll never be as cool as me, so just put aside your differences and pray for your downed homies in **SOCOM II**. Peace out, yo.

Gangsta-Dan

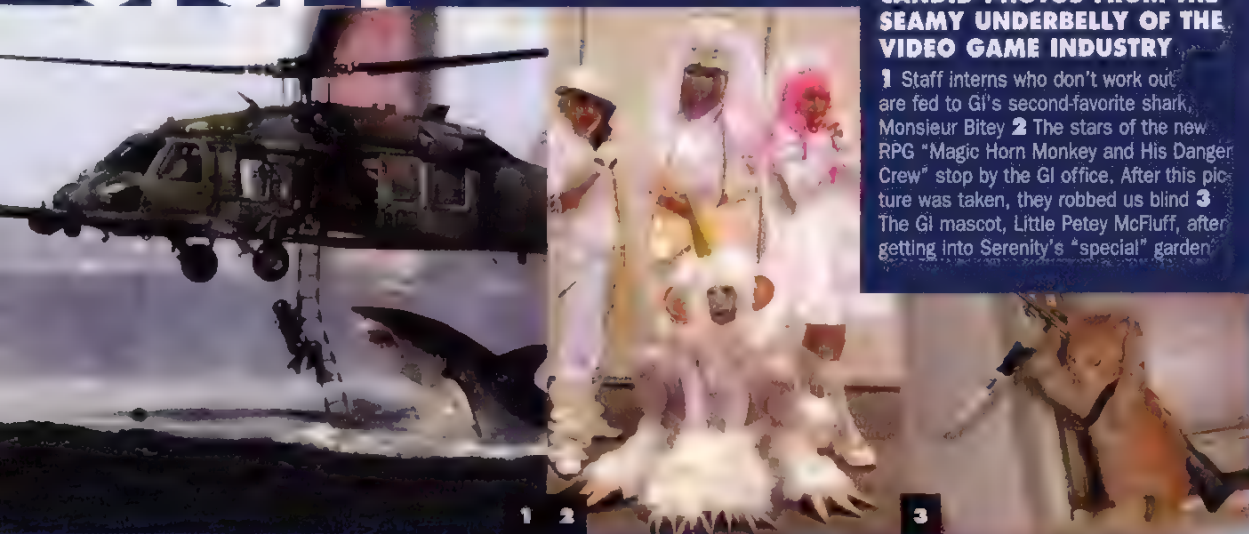
Gangsta-Dan  
(a.k.a. MC Bowser)



**SERENITY, THE KARMIC GAMER**

I am one with the universe. I am all things, and all things are me. There are, like, forces in the universe that bind us all together into one big, gooey, wonderful ball of energy and love! I love video games, but then again, I love everything, because everything is one. Have I ever played a game that I don't like? No, because everything is perfect in the 100 eyes of the Goddess. I knitted a console cozy for my Xbox out of environmentally-friendly hemp yarn. Now it has better Feng Shui, which is good for my Chi.

## GI SPY



### CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE SEAMY UNDERBELLY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

1 Staff interns who don't work out are fed to GI's second-favorite shark, Monsieur Bitey 2 The stars of the new RPG "Magic Horn Monkey and His Danger Crew" stop by the GI office. After this picture was taken, they robbed us blind 3 The GI mascot, Little Petey McFluff, after getting into Serenity's "special" garden



**KILLIAN THE JADED, HARDCORE GAMER**

I don't know about you people, but it seems to me that the industry has grown flat like a two-week old can of Coke. Not since the release of *Typing of the Dead* has there truly been a revolutionary title. Wow, you mean in *Lifeline* I actually get to talk to the character? Ever hear of a little game called *Seaman*? Oooh, you mean I can steal cars in *Grand Theft Auto*? Big whoop. And another thing: Why do companies keep bringing back games like *Prince of Persia* and *Spy Hunter* when there's a gold mine of future million-sellers like *Burning Rangers*, *Nights*, and *Chu Chu Rocket* sitting right before their very eyes? It's a sad, sad world that we live in, folks. Oh...I know I've said this a thousand times before, but if you don't have a Dreamcast yet, buy one immediately. While you're at the store, you might as well sell your Xbox, GameCube, and PlayStation 2 as well since you'll never play them again.

## DEAR GI

### SUCKMASTERS >>>

Dear Suckmasters,

I just wanted to write and tell you that your magazine sucks hard. I've been a subscriber for 16 years now, and it has always sucked. Know why it sucks? Cause sometimes you print something that isn't right. For example, seven years ago in your May issue, you said that Terry from *Amphibian Adventures IV* was a turtle. HE'S NOT A TURTLE, HE'S A TORTISE!!!! THERE'S A DIFFERENCE, A\*#HOLES! That is why you guys suck. I hope that you now realize how much you suck.

You suck,  
Fred Durlingmeyer  
Red Water Gulch, Illinois

P.S. Enclosed is a check to renew my subscription.

■ Thanks for letting us know how much we suck. We love receiving such helpful, constructive criticism. The staffer who wrote the offending comment has been fired and shot. His rotting carcass is propped up on the break room couch as a reminder for the other editors about what happens to those who make such horrendous mistakes.

### NEEDS ADVICE >>>

I need dating advice. None of the girls in the real world are as hot (or as butt-kicking) as girls in video games. I think real girls should try to be more hot, and they should always wear hot clothes like metal bras, thongs, and super-high heels. I think I have a right to be so picky, because I'm quite a catch myself. I'm a 60th level paladin, my *EverQuest* skills are unparalleled, and I'm in quite a few extracurricular activities. I'm president of the Chess Club, captain of the Debate Team, and founder of the Sherman High School Anime Appreciation Society. Plus, my mom says I'm quite handsome.

DarthWilber\_theAnime\_ master@quinhole.com

■ We're sure any respectable supermodel would love to go out with a bespectacled, 300-pound mama's boy like yourself Wilber, so what's the problem? But if you can't get over your dry spell, a series of sexy robots based on the girls of *Final Fantasy* will be on the market in Japan next summer, so dating will soon be a thing of the past anyway. Of course, we've got them already and they are awesome! Whoo-hoo!



**FRANK AND HANK, THE SIAMESE TWIN GAMERS**

**FRANK:** Hello all! My name is Frank and my cojoined twin Hank and I

just started here at GI! Whoa! I'm so thrilled to be here, and I can't wait to play some games! My favorites are titles like *Animal Crossing*, *Harvest Moon*, *The Sims*, and stuff like that. I'm not too into all the violent stuff.

**HANK:** Sup. I'm Hank, and I'm stuck to my suckball brother here. I like MGD, chicks (like Mary Kate Olsen. Frank can have that skank Ashley), and muscle cars. Games are pretty sweet, too. You all played *Vice City*, right? That game is hella tight. I can't wait for that *Leisure Suit Larry* game. I hear there are gonna be boobies in that.

## WACHOWSKIS APOLOGIZE, START OVER

With tears rolling down his cheeks and a snot rag grasped firmly in his hands, **Andy Wachowski** woefully admitted, "**The Matrix** sequels are absolute trash." If you walked out of the theater confused and wondering what had just transpired on screen, Andy is right with you. "When we were filming these sequels, we had no idea what we were doing. We didn't even have a script. The night before a shoot, we would write random dialogue on napkins and have the actors grab them from a hat. We were kind of hoping that people would be so befuddled by the story that they would trick themselves into thinking that it's brilliant. As it turns out, moviegoers were much smarter than we anticipated."



With mountains of hate mail piling up before their very eyes, the Wachowski brothers have decided to start from scratch and make things right. "We're redoing both sequels," says Andy. "We actually have a pretty clever idea for these movies, and we're confident that we can make them just as memorable as the first chapter. We have a feeling that **The Matrix Redo** will completely change the face of cinema forever!" This is not just a second attempt at amendment. It's a whole new approach to film making. With a twinkle in his eye, Andy revealed what makes this film so special. "With **The Matrix Reloaded**, we tied the story to the video game. With **The Matrix Redo**, we are binding it to breakfast cereal, pajamas, a board game, toothpaste – which I've chosen to be bubble gum flavored, and four new video games. As our way of saying sorry, if you purchase all of these items, you'll get a free ticket to **The Matrix Redo**. People who pick up all the merch will have a greater understanding of what's happening in the **Matrix** universe."

When asked whether or not the story would make sense without the items on the side, Andy, looking dazed, said, "Kind of...I think. It should. We hope. At the very least, you'll want to read the back of the **Ne-oh's** cereal box, play the second and third video games, and wear the pajamas at least twice. You're going to love it."

## MANHUNT: THE MUSICAL ON ICE TAKES NATION BY STORM

"Ever since I was a little boy, I've wanted to make an on-ice musical," comments **Rocketstar Games'** president **Sam Houser**. "**Manhunt** just happens to be the perfect vehicle for this dream." With big name talent like **David Carradine** playing the role of James Earl Cash, **Andrew McCarthy** filling the shoes of the mysterious Director, and famed skaters like **Brian Boitano**, **Todd Eldredge**, and **Nancy Korrikan** as Carcer City's killers, **Manhunt** is a production like no other. Watching Boitano perform a triple Lutz-double toe loop as he belts out the chorus from "**Life Seems So Different (From Inside a Plastic Bag)**" is so moving that it will make you leap out of your seat and sing along. Whether you find yourself humming Piggy's "**I Wanna Hear You Squeal!**" at work, or singing your kids to sleep with the melodic piece "**Just Me And My Chainsaw**," **Manhunt: The Musical On Ice** is something that will stick with you for a lifetime!



## NINTENDO GOES F\*%#ING CRAZY

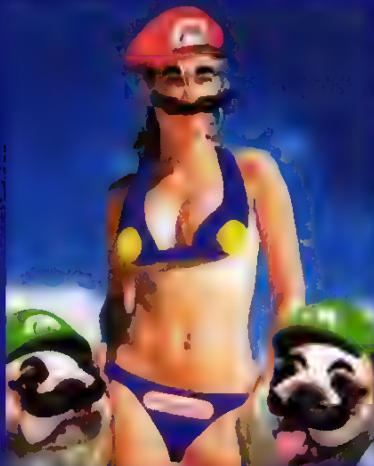
On April 1, 2004, the world learned that the entire **Nintendo** organization had been gripped by a mysterious insanity. When mental health professionals arrived at Nintendo headquarters, they were greeted by employees wearing nothing other than Mario hats, wallowing in their own filth, chirping like Pokémon, and even playing **1000\* Aviancho**. The psychiatric workers were alerted by concerned journalists, who called from a press conference after witnessing the bizarre behavior of legendary game creator **Shigeru Miyamoto**.

At this now-infamous event, a doghouse was lowered onto the stage. Emerging from it was Miyamoto, dressed from head to toe in a Dalmatian outfit. As he bounced around the stage and barked at the top of his lungs, those in attendance looked on in horror and confusion. After throwing bones to people in the crowd, Miyamoto roared from all fours and said, "I have a dog. His name is Pikachu. I love

him very much. So I thought, why should I have all the fun? Our pets should be able to play games too!" At that moment, 12 cats, 14 dogs, and an enormous pig trotted onto stage with Nintendo's newest system, The Petendo, fastened to their collars. The pets proceeded to demo the hardware by playing two games, **Kitten Fancy: Feast in Atlantis**, and **Doggie Style Frosty Skateboarding**. Miyamoto hopped in place, clapping and making faint yipping noises as the pets pawed the system's one huge yellow button for a few seconds. Within moments, the disinterested animals wandered off the stage and began sniffing the crotches of those in attendance. Miyamoto cackled gleefully and shouted "Soon I will make games for

your food to play! Happy pie!"

At this point, the curtain behind him opened to reveal several female dancers in bikinis with huge Mario-style moustaches. Each danced spastically back and forth while holding cards that depicted items of food, such as pizza slices and donuts, playing video games. "Games for people, games for pets, games for food," they chanted. At this point, several journalists crept away and alerted authorities.



# PREVIEWS

XBOX | PC | N-GAGE

## RETURN TO BATTLEFIELD OF HONOR 1942

WHO LIKES SHOOTIN'?



**In an attempt** to bring something different to the video game world, Swamp Rocket Games, based in Crabshoes, Louisiana (best known for Yank Hunter and Yank Hunter Too: You Shore Gotta Purty Mouth), is trying something that has never been done before: A first-person shooter set in World War II.

Swamp Rocket president Charles Ray Sutter took the time to talk to us about this new project, entitled Return to Battlefield of Honor 1942. Charles Ray is confident that this game will be unlike anything gamers have ever seen.

"It's gonna be great," says Charles Ray. "We're gonna put you right in the war. There are gonna be a bunch a guns, and bullets. Makes no sense to have guns without bullets, right? We're gonna recreate all these famous battles, and there's gonna be sh\*t blowing up all over the place. We're pretty sure nothing like this game has ever been done before."

When asked what qualifications his team has to create such an ambitious game, Charles Ray grew distant, casting his eyes down on the floor. "Experience, man," he said solemnly. "We've lived through it. See, me and the guys drove to Oklahoma and played in this big game of paintball where they recreated D-Day. I tell ya, you don't know what war is like until you reach over to check on your buddy and come away with a handful of red goo. It chills ya to the bone. 'Course, when he gets up and goes over to the picnic table for some Gatorade you feel better."

Everyone at Swamp Rocket is obviously proud of the game, and they boast it will feature levels, explosions, lots of camouflage, and even some helicopters. "Of course," Charles Ray adds happily. "The best thing about this game is that you get to shoot Nazis. And we all hate Nazis, right?" He then started stroking the rifle on his desk lovingly.

At this point in the interview, we crept quietly towards the door as he whispered baby talk to the gun, and vowed never to come back to Louisiana.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTIN' (UP TO A BUNCHA PEOPLE VIA INTERNET) ■ **PUBLISHER** DIXIE FRIED GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** SWAMP ROCKET GAMES ■ **RELEASE** EVENTUALLY

PLAYSTATION 2

## BRITNEY'S AWAKENING

BRITNEY - IN YOUR HANDS!

**In an effort** to pimp herself out in as many ways as possible, Britney Spears has announced that she will star in her first role-playing game. She will play a poor, young peasant with her girlish charms as her only weapon. Britney will venture through the medieval land of Spearsaiot in an attempt to become princess of the realm. Players will help her escape the dark wizard Max Martin, discover Justin Timberlake's mighty sword, and battle the evil witch Christina Aguilera. Over the quest, Britney will, uhh...blossom as she gains levels, and "encounter" more experienced heroines like Madonna and Janet Jackson (complete with alternate Super Bowl costume). Britney, we're slaves 4 U.



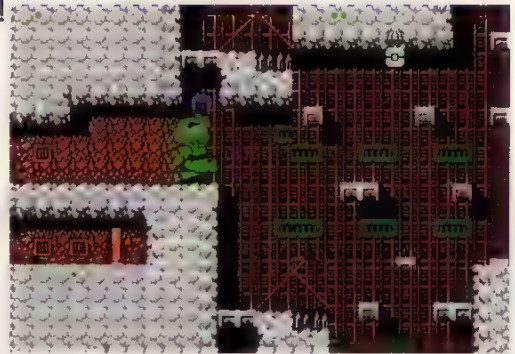
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING ■ **PUBLISHER** LEGAL AGE INTERACTIVE ■ **DEVELOPER** NOT A GIRL, NOT YET A WOMAN GAMES ■ **RELEASE** UHH...

XBOX

## HALO 2D: TREASURE OF THE SILENT CARTOGRAPHER

WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN US?!?!?

**In a shocking** announcement right before he left the company, Ed Fries of Microsoft revealed that everything you have heard about Halo 2 is an elaborate hoax. The real Halo sequel is a classic side-scrolling adventure in which Master Chief must collect 100 magic coins in order to defeat the leader of the Covenant, King G. Sparty. In classic 8-bit style, Master Chief will spend the quest leaping across bottomless pits, avoiding spiky ceilings, and jumping over spinning arms of fire. When asked why he would leave Microsoft with a product that will certainly be a disaster, Fries shrugged and said, "Those f@#\*ers cancelled Tork. I loved that game. Halo 2D is my revenge!"



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER JUMPIN' AND COIN-COLLECTING ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE ■ **RELEASE** TOMORROW

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | GAME GEAR | JAGUAR | DEEP BLUE

## NINJA GAYMEN

SILENT, SNEAKY, AND STYLISH

**Thanks to a trend** in popular television, there is now far more interest in fashion among heterosexual males. Unfortunately, not everyone has seen the light. The Ninja Gaymen are here to help those poor misguided straight guys, whether they want it or not.

In this title, you will guide a team of fabulously dressed ninja fashion experts into the homes of straight people in the dead of night. Without being caught, you must update their dated living spaces, replace their Hypercolor T-shirts with Armani suits, and sneak hair product into their medicine cabinets. Successfully update enough clueless heterosexuals, and you'll start a fashion trend, which will cause the hipper straights to update by themselves. The goal is to make the entire world a more fabulous place and spread a message of beauty, tolerance, and frosted highlights. But the best part of this game? Unlockable grooming tips!



■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/FASHION ■ **PUBLISHER** OUT OF THE CLOSET GAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** FAB FIVE GAMES ■ **RELEASE** ARBOR DAY



MAC

## SIM PRESIDENT

RULE WITH AN IRON FIST

**Frank:** I thought this game was a great way to learn about the governmental process. I found it very stimulating. I liked the way it presented a complex look at what it means to be Commander-in-Chief.

**Hank:** Being president rocked. I screwed the people for generations by giving tax cuts to the ultra-wealthy, and I attacked anyone who looked at me funny. Bite me, United Nations!

**Frank:** I, on the other hand, tried to use the vast resources of the United States to save the environment and reduce the poverty in the inner city and impoverished rural areas.

**Hank:** That's 'cause you're a Nancy-boy. I didn't bother with those losers. I was too busy taking vacations at Camp David and partying with interns to be bothered.



**Frank:** This game could be a really good learning tool for you, Hank. It could teach you compassion for your fellow man.

**Hank:** Shut up, pansy. If I were really president, I'd have people like you put to sleep.

**Frank:** I'm gonna tell Mom you said that!

**Hank:** You do and you're dead.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER EGO TRIP ■ **PUBLISHER** ENRON ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** THE ILLUMINATI ■ **RELEASE** PRESIDENT'S DAY (DUH!)

DOESN'T MATTER, IT SUCKS!

## STEPHEN HAWKINGS' UNDERGROUND

ANOTHER BIG, STEAMING PILE OF SUCK

**M**an, what's up with games today? I thought this one might be kinda decent, but the more I played it, the more I found myself longing for some of the classic racers of yesterday. This title can't hold a candle to racers like Daytona USA, F355 Challenge: Passione Rossa, Flag to Flag, or Metropolis Street Racer. Never heard of any of those games? That's because they're all on Dreamcast, the best system that none of you chumps bought.

Seriously, what is with all you gamers today? Why are you so hung up on the PS2? If you can actually get the thing to work, all the games look like crap. And Xbox, what's up with that? It weighs like 90 pounds, and it's got like one game that anyone plays! Why not just call it the HaloBox? And don't get me started on the GameCube. The GameCube...well, like most of you, I've never played the GameCube. But it's purple! It's a kiddy system! It sucks! (I assume). Then there's the GBA. The Game Gear was in color long before this piece of crap. Plus it was big, so you wouldn't lose it. Man, games today just make me tired.

So where was I? Oh yeah. This game here, it sucks. — **KILLIAN**

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER CRAP ■ **PUBLISHER** SOME CRAPPY COMPANY ■ **DEVELOPER** WELL, IT AIN'T SEGA, THAT'S FOR SURE ■ **RELEASE** WHO CARES?



**THE BOTTOM LINE**  
**MATURE** Frank: 8.7598624  
**ESRB** Hank: A Full Six-Pack

- **Concept:** Can you do a better job than the real president? Probably
- **Graphics:** Politicians are ugly
- **Sound:** Sounds like I'm about to bomb your ass, Europe!
- **Playability:** Who knew this was such an easy job?
- **Entertainment:** Eat it, poor people!
- **Replay Value:** Four more years!

**SECOND OPINION**  
 I loved this game because I finally got a member of the Green Party in the White House. You know what else I love? Kittens, and fresh grapes, and a cool wind on a hot summer day. And the Indigo Girls. Their music is so, like, spiritual, you know? And Fritos! I LOVE Fritos! Man, I've got the munchies!  
**SERENITY - 10**

**THE BOTTOM LINE**  
**EVERYONE** E CRAP  
**ESRB**

- **Concept:** A really smart guy in a chair races against dumb guys in cars
- **Graphics:** Good, but not Dreamcast good
- **Sound:** Sounds like me not caring
- **Playability:** I don't like this controller at all
- **Entertainment:** It's fun if you're stupid and don't know what a good game is really like
- **Replay Value:** None!

**SECOND OPINION**  
 This be hot stuff, playa! Wheelie Steve's got hisself one tricked-out ride. I had to be in a wheelchair for six months when I was a shorty, yo. My Moms ran over my foot with a lawnmower. Now I gots me a prosthetic foot with gold plating and diamond toenails! Cha-ching!  
**GANGSTA-DAN - 5**



## GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES PARK IN REDMOND WASHINGTON

> **Manufacturer:** Microsoft  
 > **Website:** oh-so-very-ashamed.com  
 > **List price:** You will actually be paid to visit!

Who says big corporations never give back? The generous souls at Microsoft not only built this park, but it's made out of 100% recycled material. Every unsold copy of Grabbed by the Ghoulies was rounded up and used to build playground equipment for the children of Redmond, Washington. So when we said that no child would ever touch this game, we were clearly wrong. GI apologizes for the error.



## WOLFBOY

> **Manufacturer:** His parents  
 > **Website:** None  
 > **List Price:** Free to a good home

We found Wolfboy in the woods behind Hank's Drinkin' Shack. Apparently raised by wolves, Wolfboy had no idea how to use his thumbs when we found him. So we've been teaching him to play games, thereby learning about opposable digits and becoming a functional member of society. Every

time he gets a high score, we give him a raw pork chop! Now we just have to figure out a way to make him stop humping Killian's leg.


## EYETOY: DRUNK

> **Manufacturer:** Sony > **Website:** eyetoydrunk.com  
 > **List Price:** \$49.99

First there was EyeToy: Play, then EyeToy: Groove, and now there's EyeToy: Drunk. This newest collection simulates the experience of having a few too many brews. It includes a variety of games, such as "Questionably Hot Chick," "Aiming for the Toilet," and even the bar fight simulator, "Man, I Can Take That Guy." If you're not old enough to drink legally,

EyeToy: Drunk will fill you in on all the finer points of the nightlife scene. Sure, it's a terrible idea, but it's from Sony, so you'll buy it anyway! BWAHAHAHA!





For Kit Yun, the  
only way out of the  
Hong Kong underworld  
is to go back in.



Violence

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# JET LI RISE TO HONOR 義氣



A dying man's last wish. An undercover cop who's running out of time. Jet Li is Kit Yun in Rise to Honor, the story of a cop sworn to fulfill his duty, yet bound by a promise to a powerful crime lord. Now Kit must enter a shadowy world where, to preserve his honor, he'll have to risk his life. But as his enemies will soon learn, sometimes the one who is most honorable...is also the most deadly.

PlayStation 2



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.  
PLAY IN OURS.

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# CRASH BANDICOOT TWIN SANITY

## THE ODD COUPLE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSEL  
■ DEVELOPER TRAVELER'S TALKS ■ RELEASE SEPTEMBER



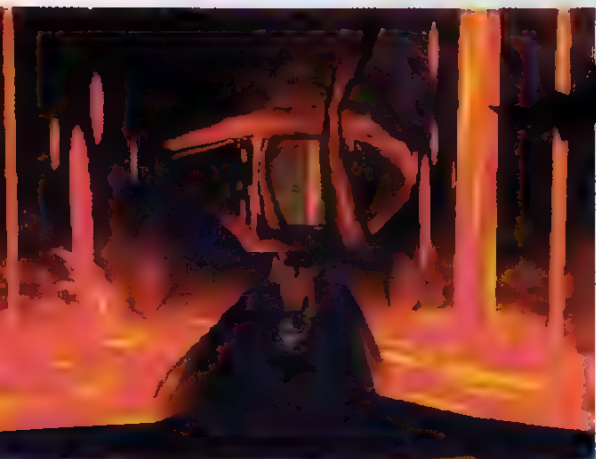


**W**hen prodded, producer and creative director David Robinson eventually offers up a list of influences for Traveller's Tale's latest foray into the world of Crash Bandicoot. He does insist on one concession with this

list, though – that the number one spot is a tie. Titled Twinsanity, the greater theme of the game is something more ambitious than most video games attempt. It's really Jay and Silent Bob with a heaping portion of Ren and Stimpy thrown in for good measure. In fact, Kevin Smith's muses and the cartoon love-hate duo of the century are the top picks in Robinson's list because they each offer a version of opposing personalities spending a freakish amount of time together. In Twinsanity,

Crash and his long-winded evil nemesis Cortex must share some quality time together in the name of defending their homeland from a pair of Evil Twins.

While this dynamic has been a constant source of inspiration in movies, sitcoms, and cartoons, it's been attempted less frequently in video games. Technology certainly was a factor – it takes more processing power to have two highly animated characters than just one, but developers' hesitance to take on more complex storytelling techniques is definitely one as well. Traveller's Tales has taken a few important steps to ensure that this experiment is a success across all areas of the player's experience, including dialogue, story structure, environment design, and most certainly gameplay. Oh yeah, and they want it to be a good Crash game. Maybe even the best one yet.



Cortex's evil contraptions will benefit both parties. The Evil Twins (right) force the two characters together





The environment is generally larger and more impressive.



Breakin' boxes - some things have to stay from the original.

The last Crash Bandicoot adventure game, *Wrath of Cortex*, was a first on many levels. It was the first appearance by the bandicoot on PS2, as well as the first platforming title developed by someone other than the character's creators, Naughty Dog. *Traveller's Tales* put out that entry, and it was seen as solid, if a bit too much like the other Crash games. Robinson explains, "We had the technology to really do what we wanted to do, but we had a pretty short development cycle - about 12 months." The team made the decision to keep the flavor of Crash, but wait until their next go-around for the big changes.

*Traveller's Tales* felt that players appreciated the tight gameplay design, dynamic difficulty, and the obvious connection they have with the title character. The goal with this entry is to keep these core ideas in mind, but to really offer a true update to the series. *Wrath of Cortex* ended with the villain encased in a block of ice - presumably a permanent home. *Twinsanity* starts with a predictable turn of events as Cortex thaws out, but as is constantly referenced by everyone involved with the title, the rules have been thrown away.

Jordan Reichek (whose credits include *Ren and Stimpy*, *Tiny Toons*, *Animaniacs*, *The Simpsons*, *The Baby Huey Show*, and *Invader Zim*) has been brought in to offer the cinematic bent that *Traveller's Tales* has been pushing for. He's helping the team out with script, characters, setups, visual gags, and mechanics; and a sure example of his

influence is offered in the opening level.

Players start *Twinsanity* by letting Crash cruise around his idyllic island home. He hears his sister, Coco, calling for him to come to her. Although Crash can't see what's really going on, players are shown that it's not Coco yelling - it's Cortex wearing a dress, beckoning the hero into a trap. The best part is that Cortex seems to really enjoy running around in drag; he skips with girlish glee, he giggles, he wags his finger to help Crash ahead, and he generally tries to be as perky and upbeat as Coco. Anyone who's played the earlier games gets the gag, and even new people will readily respond to the '50s flip bouffant coupled with a mean black goatee. It's this very particular brand of off-kilter humor that Reichek is known for, and which he is bringing in spades to refresh the Crash franchise.

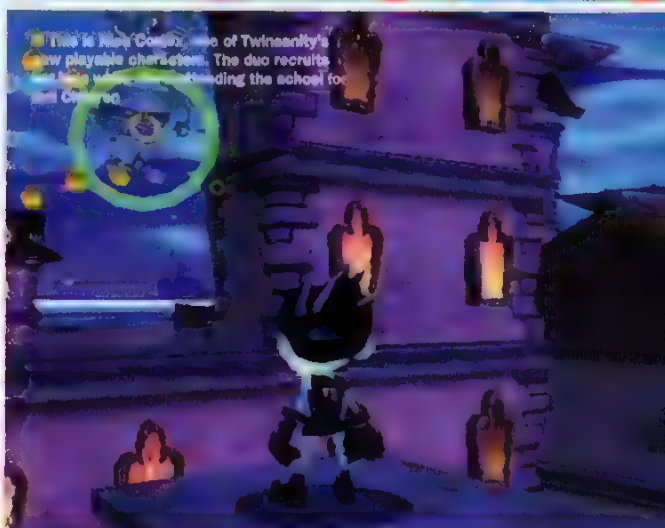
Cortex is serving two purposes by luring Crash. It offers a brief training-by-example tutorial level and gets the hero over to his newest creation called the Mechabandicoot. This is the first boss-like encounter, but a force greater than either Crash or Cortex quickly interrupts it - The Evil Twins have come for some righteous retribution against Cortex. But the madman doesn't entirely know what he's done. Here is where the game starts to differentiate itself from the herd by forcing the two to join forces or The Evil Twins will destroy their shared home. But that doesn't mean that they like each other - delightfully, they don't at all.



Cortex, dressed as Coco, has a little skipping run that's best described as...um, whimsical.



The evil science lab is a predictable, but still entertaining, area to hang out.



This is Nini Comedy, one of *Twinsanity's* new playable characters. The duo recruits her to help with...ending the school for...and Comedy.

**Traveller's Tales is still working on extra animations like this, but they're, "trying to figure out where the boundaries are," says Robinson**



**I**n fact, they start fighting right away. Random one-liners penned by Reichek and others pepper the gameplay constantly, and the team was told repeatedly by Robinson, "If [the player] stops, something funny should happen. Players should laugh at every opportunity." We were shown a level shortly after Crash and Cortex begrudgingly joined forces. The pair is in an underground cavern that has chutes and shafts popping out in every direction. They begin to fight. It's like watching an old-school *Looney Tunes* cartoon – there's little more than a ball of dust with fists and legs pumping furiously out of it. It's like seeing two friends (that should probably spend some time apart) wrestling on the ground – you don't know if they're fighting or playing. Here, the gameplay switches to the familiar dynamic of getting a ball successfully down a chute. It's familiar, and not the most earth-shattering idea, but the premise is funny and the execution shows a promising attention to detail. Say, for instance, that the player reaches a plateau and stops the movement of the fighters. Traveller's Tales is creating animations to randomly occur when the ball is not in motion – we saw Cortex bend Crash over his knee and offer a few good wallops to the bandicoot's backside. Another lets

Crash throttle Cortex's neck as his ridiculously large

head flops back and forth.

In usual Crash fashion, there are more of these sequences that deviate from the traditional platforming action. In the "Doc Amuk" scenario, for example, Cortex is accosted by a full hive of bees. He runs wildly, screaming and flailing, while the player (controlling Crash) has to get obstacles out of his way. TNT boxes, which were merely roadblocks in earlier games, now explode in chain reactions that the player must account for. These areas play distinct homage to earlier 2D side-scrolling adventures.

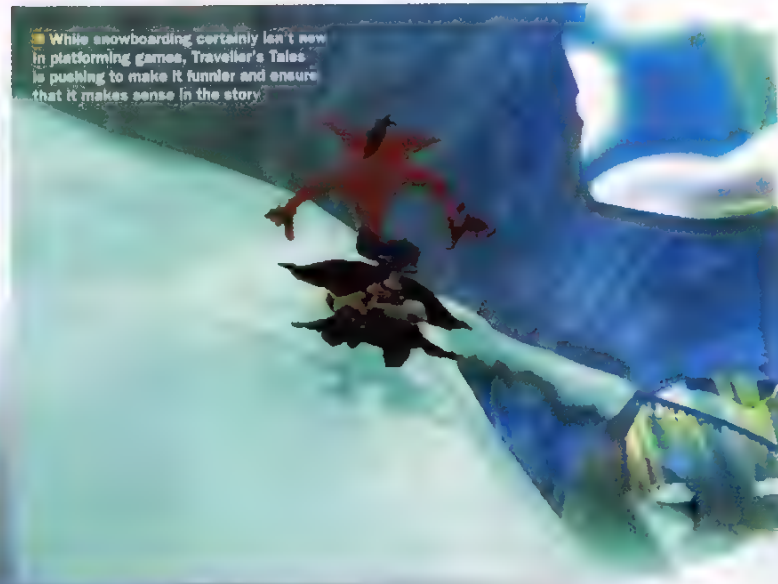
But how do players get from one place to another? Gone is the hub room utilized by previous Crash games. "We wanted the story to drive the gameplay, so players do different things, but the reason is based in the plot," explains Robinson. Offering gamers full control of the camera is a switch for the series, and while the gameplay still provides a general path for players to go down, there is no loading and the title features many side quests. The ultimate goal is a sense of freedom previously not seen in the series.

The worlds that we saw featured interaction that wasn't crucial to moving the story forward, but increased the replay value and offered something for completists. In Crash and Cortex's island home there are butterflies and monkeys idly living their lives. If you scare the monkeys, the critters will crawl up a tree and start chucking produce at the offender. Other times, players can solve mini-puzzles that plant a seed, which grows a tree that produces a crystal.

These crystals are important for many reasons – the plot is driven by the team's need to collect them, and the gameplay is also affected by their existence.



TNT and Nitro boxes are no longer just obstacles – activating them will be required to solve puzzles and complete levels

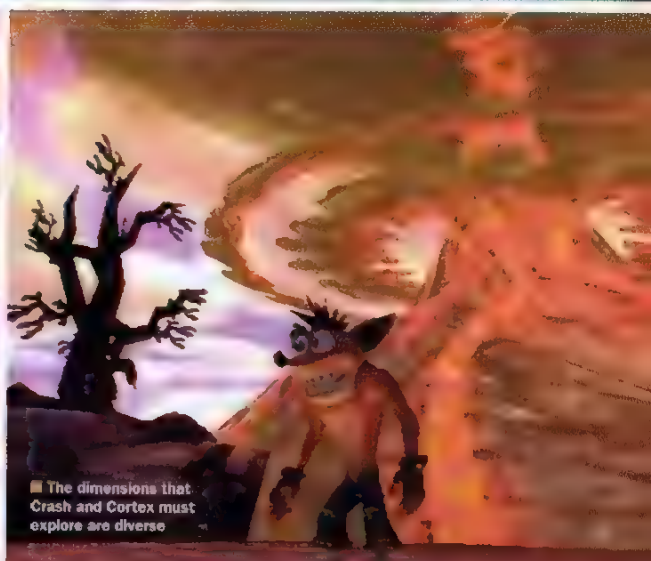
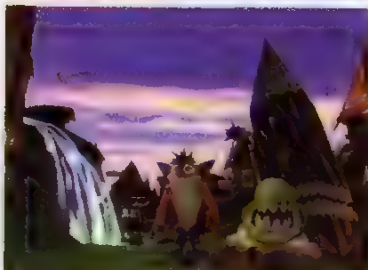


While snowboarding certainly isn't new in platforming games, Traveller's Tales is pushing to make it funnier and ensure that it makes sense in the story





■ Ambient life, like these bats, makes the environments more engaging



■ The dimensions that Crash and Cortex must explore are diverse

**T**he crystals do not initially affect Crash's solo abilities, but the team is adding a handful of extra moves to the star. In addition to the spin, body slam, slide, and crawl from earlier offerings, our bandicoot du jour will also punch out of a spin, long jump, and scissor-kick for more variety. Surely, fans of the series will be most happy, though, to finally have control over one persnickety fellow. And that is Cortex.

Cortex is playable in a number of forms. By himself, he offers the only inorganic weapon in the game – his gun. To counter this advantage, and further reinforce his character, the villain is seriously always-getting-picked-last-in-gym uncoordinated. His jump is neither high nor long; and when trying to slide, the evil genius just falls flat on his face.

"Players interact with characters – not guns or cars or whatever," says Robinson of the team's priorities. Daringly, the tag-team dynamic is carried over into a particularly dangerous part of the team's ambitious plan – combining the characteristics of both Crash and Cortex. Robinson explains, "These are two strong personalities and [Traveller's Tales is seeing] how they play off of each other." In addition to their separate physical actions, the duo can be controlled as a pair when they are joined together by the aforementioned crystals.

We saw the discovery of a crystal, and while Cortex gripped one end, Crash pulled on the other – effectively tying them together into one character (albeit one that is kicking and screaming the whole way). In this form, Crash can swing Cortex for a greater attack radius or throw him to an otherwise unreachable area. Of his own accord, Cortex will even attack enemies after he lands – mostly because he's just plain cruel.

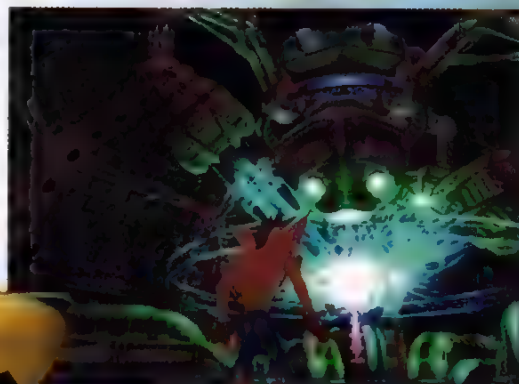
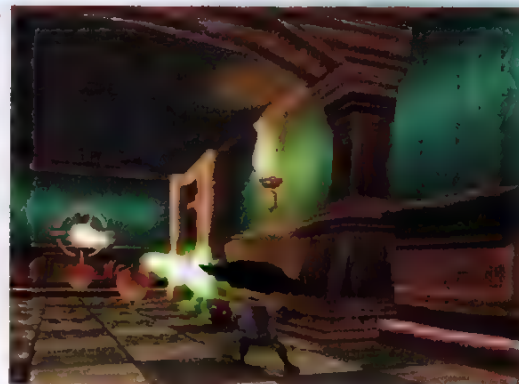
Everyone involved with the project wants to make something extremely clear – Cortex is not a prop. Through

their actions, both Crash and Cortex will play off of the other's strengths and weaknesses. After approaching a farmer who asks the duo to eradicate some worms on his property in return for the crystal he has, Crash thinks about the deal while Cortex simply pulls out his gun and blasts the overall-clad resident. Crash slyly shrugs to the camera and picks up the shard. He seems to come to terms with the fact that at the bare minimum, Cortex gets stuff done.

There are also stages in an reversed dimension where an evil Crash and a truly worthless Cortex must go to continue the battle against The Evil Twins. In these areas, the Doc Amuk side-scrolling gameplay is reversed as Crash is required to injure Cortex to get the madman back on track. In this opposite condition, the pretty, pretty butterflies floating on the gentle breeze constantly distract Cortex, and he is nothing more than a nonsensical goon.

Seemingly everything in this game goes back to reinforcing the relationship between these characters.

It's refreshing and dangerous for anyone to take a franchise this well known and try to mess with the system – but it could be just what the series needs. Thankfully, it seems that this developer at least understands that gamers are growing up. Traveller's Tales wants players to learn about each character through their actions, their abilities, and their responses. And, besides those lofty goals – the team wants us laugh our butts off.



# PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

## GOD OF WAR

WAR IS COMING

### Suicide. It's not the first thing

you expect to read about in a video game article. Then again, it's not the first thing you expect to see at the start of a video game. But that's exactly what happens at the beginning of Sony's new title *God of War*; it opens with the protagonist flinging himself off a cliff. On his way down, the last weeks of his life flash before his eyes, revealing why he decided to end it. Those fateful days make up *God of War*'s gameplay. In other words, you play through a flashback leading up to his death. If that sounds unusual for a game, then hold on – it's not the only way that this title will surprise you.

*God of War* is "what *Clash of the Titans* would be if done in the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine," says David Jaffe, director of the title's development. Jaffe, best known for his work on *Twisted Metal: Black*, described the title as the story of a (as-yet-unnamed) former Spartan warrior on a quest to kill Ares, the God of War. To do so, he must retrieve the fabled artifact Pandora's Box. On his mission, he encounters many of Greek mythology's most famous icons, including minotaur, cyclopes, and even Medusa.

At first glance, *God of War* might look like just another third-person action game in the vein of *Devil May Cry* or *Rygar*. But the dark story is only one way *God of War* will defy the expectations of the genre. Puzzle solving will twist familiar gaming conventions; rather than pushing a

box onto a switch, you may be required to push a human sacrifice into a flame.

Of course, action is at the heart of this title, and *God of War*'s take on combat is certainly exciting. The protagonist features two wicked blades chained to his wrists. Up close they function as swords, while at a distance they can be used as whips. Although this title isn't scheduled to hit until the beginning of 2005, combat is already highly polished and extremely fluid.

While the melee action looks great, the innovative quick kill system is what makes this game truly compelling. A grab can be initiated by pressing a button near an enemy. After that, a series of button presses will appear on screen. By hitting the buttons with proper sequence and timing, the hero will deliver a complex and devastating attack. For example, he may grab a Medusa from behind and twist her head until it pops off, and then use it to turn enemies to stone, or even climb a cyclops while dodging the creature's limbs, and deliver the monster a series of fatal blows to the head and neck! These attacks are quite over the top and bloody, and will certainly earn the game a Mature rating. Since it debuted at Sony Gamers' Day, the game has quickly become one of the PS2's most anticipated new titles. Over a year away, *God of War* already looks amazing. We can't wait to see how it looks when it's finished.



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** SCEA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** 2005



Go on, goose him. We dare you



You can bet that this puzzle won't be as simple as you'd expect



Even in this early build the environments simply rock. Hey, there are rocks in this shot! We're funny



The chains will be your primary weapon



XBOX

# MECHASSAULT 2

## MUCH MORE THAN MECHS

**The first MechAssault** title for Xbox found a sizable following, especially on Xbox Live – it's still one of the more popular games on the service. While the first was a solid hit, the recently announced sequel has all the makings of a breakout smash. The tentatively named MechAssault 2 features everything gamers loved about the original and so much more.

TJ Wagner of developer Day 1 Studios took some time to speak with us about the upcoming title and what he had to share with us made us giddy with anticipation. The most exciting new feature is the variety of vehicles. "This is the eventual evolution of where I've always wanted to take the game," says Wagner. Whereas MechAssault featured only mechs and a handful of stages in Elemental power armor, MechAssault 2 has you piloting mechs, tanks, VTOL aircraft, and the all-new battle armor.

You may wonder why anyone would want to pilot anything other than a mech when one is available, but Wagner filled us in on some very exciting features of the new vehicles. Tanks offer heavy firepower and maneuverability mechs

can't match, especially in tight quarters, and VTOLs can carry mobile turrets, supplies, and armor to the far corners of the battlefields. "The battle armor is one of the most exciting things for me in MechAssault 2," says Wagner. Tougher and sporting heavier weapons than the Elemental, the battle armor is a legitimate weapon, and its biggest advantage is stealth. In armor, players can scale buildings, hitch rides on tanks, and even attach to an enemy mech and take it over! In true GTA style, your human pilot can hop out of any vehicle and attempt to commandeer another. The mechs are certainly the dominant machines, of course, and will account for about 60 percent of single-player gameplay.

While the new vehicles are definitely an exciting addition to the single-player mode, consider what they will mean to multiplayer. Wagner stated that MechAssault 2 is even more geared towards team-based play than the original. Imagine, via Xbox Live, coordinating an offensive that involves a VTOL dropping battle armor inside an enemy base to steal unguarded vehicles while softening up defenses for the



This armor is attempting to take over this mech, but the mech can shake him loose

oncoming wave of mechs and tanks! Details on maps and game modes are still unconfirmed, but Wagner assures us that there will be more mechs (including many old favorites), new modes, and plenty of unlockable content. Also unconfirmed is the plot, although it will build off of the original and feature returning characters. This leads us to believe that the Blake group, the enemies from the original, will return as well.

With MechAssault 2, Microsoft looks to have another killer Xbox title on its hands. You can be sure that as soon as it hits, we'll be online, blasting fools in our MadCats.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK OR XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** DAY 1 STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** NOVEMBER



The Raptor is the first confirmed new mech, and it is a beefier version of the first title's Raven mech



Tanks are ideal for urban environments



Even mechs celebrate Independence Day



VTOLS are like medics and can deliver vital supplies and power-ups



"Wait! You forgot your wallet!"



The battle armor can climb, giving you the ability to hide from mechs



PLAYSTATION 2

# SHADOW OF ROME

## GWEAT FWENDS IN WOME

**Everyone is familiar** with the scene: a crusty old guy draped in curtains and wearing leaves on his head contorts his face and bellows in an overly dramatic voice, "Et tu, Brute?" That tired scenario is about to take on a brand new spin in *Shadow of Rome*, an upcoming title from Production Studio 2. After all, if Ridley Scott can re-write Roman history, then so can Capcom.

It is the year 44 B.C., Julius Caesar has been murdered, and the prime suspect is one of his top advisors. However, it just so happens that this advisor is the father of a soldier, Agrippa, who returns to Rome when news of the murder reaches him. Upon his arrival, he finds that his father is to be executed by the winner of a gladiatorial tournament, which he enters in hopes of having the opportunity to rescue the doomed convict. Of course, Agrippa must wade through a sea of combat sequences and severed limbs if he is to emerge victorious.

On a less bloody front, Agrippa's friend Octavius is charged with finding clues about the murder and uncovering the real culprit. The only way to accomplish this goal undetected is to sneak around, using disguises and makeshift weapons like rocks and pots. The game allows the player to alternate between the two characters, Agrippa the Warrior and Octavius the Wuss, in order to fully unravel the story surrounding the murder of Caesar through a combination of action and stealth.

The fact that this title tries to incorporate these two different genres will probably make many gamers wince; there have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to combine popular breeds of games, resulting only in confused and unfocused mutts. However, *Shadow of Rome* takes a new approach to melding gameplay styles that will hopefully avoid any issues related to identity problems. It accomplishes this by adapting to your personal style and favoring your preferred mode of play; if you excel in the action segments as Agrippa, more battle elements will be incorporated as the game progresses. If you are better with the stealth, you can look forward to more tip-toeing about with Octavius. The screenshots illustrate a few examples of each style—and don't worry if they are a little fuzzy; Capcom is utilizing a new technology to create realistic motion-blur, adding more depth to the action.

Even if juggling the two gameplay styles doesn't turn out perfectly, at least *Shadow of Rome* will deliver plenty of what we have all come expect from gladiator-related projects: over-the-top violence. It is living up to these expectations by taking the "humans are pressurized sacks of blood" approach to combat, with opponents squirting gallons as they are hewn in half by various spears, swords, and morning stars. The game is so gory, in fact, that it won't see a Japanese release, though you can expect to see it stateside sometime this winter.



Raiden looks like an even bigger sissy in robes



The World's Most Pantsless Police Chases!



Chariot races end up being bloodbaths on wheels



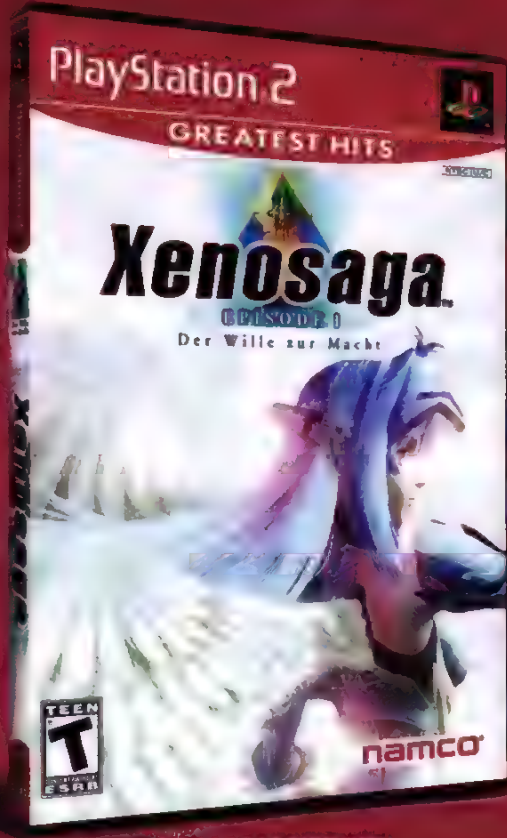
"Let me just prune that off for you..."

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 2 ■ **RELEASE** WINTER

# EPIC REVIEWS. EPIC SAGA. EPIC HIT.

...an interstellar otherspace opus of the most magnificent kind...  
 -GamePro, 4.5 out of 5

...one of the coolest stories you'll encounter...  
 -IGN, PlayStation Magazine #100 (1)



namco-xenosaga.com

"...Xenosaga is to video games as the original Star Wars is to movies."  
 -GMR, 9 out of 10

"Xenosaga is truly a triple-A title..."  
 -Game Informer, 9.75 out of 10

Calling this game epic would be an understatement.  
 -IGN

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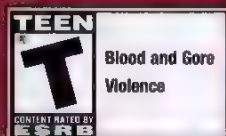
Plunge into a massive adventure as you battle against a brutal alien race across the universe.



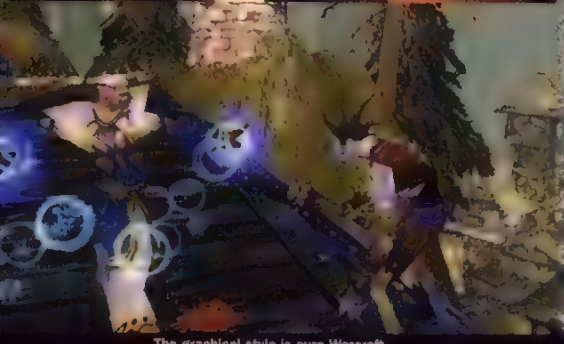
Take on 80 hours of gameplay using innovative battle and control systems.



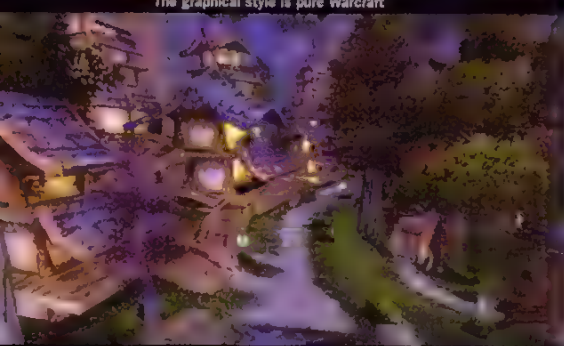
Absorb stunning graphics, awesome cinematic and beautifully rendered 3D environments.



PlayStation 2



The graphical style is pure Warcraft



We want to live in a Night Elf town



Many foes will require teamwork to defeat...



...but if you're tough enough, you can go it alone

PC UNLIMITED ENABLED

# WORLD OF WARCRAFT

## WILL YOU STOP THAT INCESSANT CLICKING?



**We recently got a** chance to interview Rob Pardo, the lead developer of World of Warcraft at renowned PC development house Blizzard Entertainment. Here's what he has to say about the highly anticipated MMORPG:

**What steps are being taken to ameliorate the standard MMORPG "experience grind?"**

Many MMORPGs can leave you feeling like you're "grinding" because you don't have a purpose for your character. To alleviate that feeling, we intend for players to always have active quests to complete. There will be a wide range of quests in the game – some relatively straightforward and some more elaborate. In addition to helping players feel like they always have a mission at hand, the quests will serve as tour guides, showing players all of the cool things to see and do in World of Warcraft.

**Will character growth follow a standard RPG formula (i.e. Level 40 mage or Level 26 warrior), or does hero advancement work a little differently?**

World of Warcraft will blend standard character advancement with other balanced modes of character development. Players will first select their character's race and class, and then they'll advance their character from level 1

to level 60. However, there will also be tons of other advancement opportunities: Players can learn trade skills, like blacksmithing, other secondary skills like fishing, talents like fire specialization for mages, and they can eventually try to obtain a Hero class such as Demon Hunter.

**Will there be story events that shape the history of Azeroth? If so, how will players be able to participate and influence them?**

Over time, the world will evolve through world events that players can participate in. For example, the Dark Portal was shut down back in the days of WarCraft II, but players in World of Warcraft may be able to find the means to once again open the portal to Draenor.

**What's the hardest thing about putting together an MMORPG and bringing it up to Blizzard's quality standards?**

The enormous size of the game. We've always been known for our high level of polish and attention to all the details in our games. We like to take our time with every feature, from how macros work, to how a dragon behaves, to how a fireball looks when cast by a mage. With the sheer amount of features and content in the game, it really puts a lot of pressure on us to maintain the level of polish that players expect of us and that we expect of ourselves, but we intend to meet these expectations.

■ **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** JUNE



Riding a Gryphon!



Just imagine what it would be like to land this monster



# CIMA

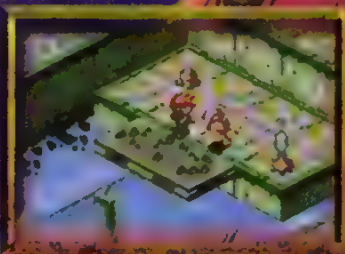
## The Enemy

### A REVOLUTIONARY NEW TYPE OF RPG!

For decades, the Human race and the CIMA race have been in constant conflict with one another.

Join Arc J., a Gate Guardian between the two worlds as he struggles to protect a group of pioneers and ultimately tries to find peace.

CIMA: The Enemy is an intriguing, real time RPG with a new "active system" - the ability to make the NPCs in the game active!



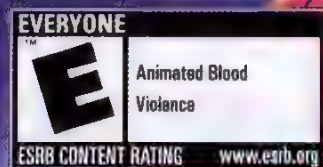
New "Active System" - use the NPCs in the game to solve various puzzles and to affect the storyline of the game!



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PLAYSTATION 2

# ONIMUSHA 3 DEMON SIEGE

## HANDS ON AND AWESOME

**We've been talking** about Capcom's closing entry to their samurai-infused survival horror franchise for quite some time, but now that we've gotten to play portions of it, we can say seriously that this game is worth the wait. It's better than the first two entries, and not just for the features the company spilled long ago about the title. Sure, the star power is money well spent, but the rest of the game is shaping up to be a truly memorable sendoff to the series.

The list of updated or changed features for this chapter, in comparison to its predecessors, is certainly impressive – Donnie Yen as CG action director and martial arts choreographer, fully polygonal backgrounds, and two protagonists are the clear highlights, but that list doesn't really convey what's been done with the series. The two main characters (and two locations in wildly different time periods) offer more variety through different attack styles,

alternate strategies, and an increased pace than we would have ventured to guess.

The game throws the time-change at you right away. Almost immediately after the truly epic opening cinema, Samanosuke is warped to Paris and Jaques is flung into ancient Japan. The story for the first third of the game switches between characters frequently, offering players the differing gameplay mechanics of each hero on a regular basis.

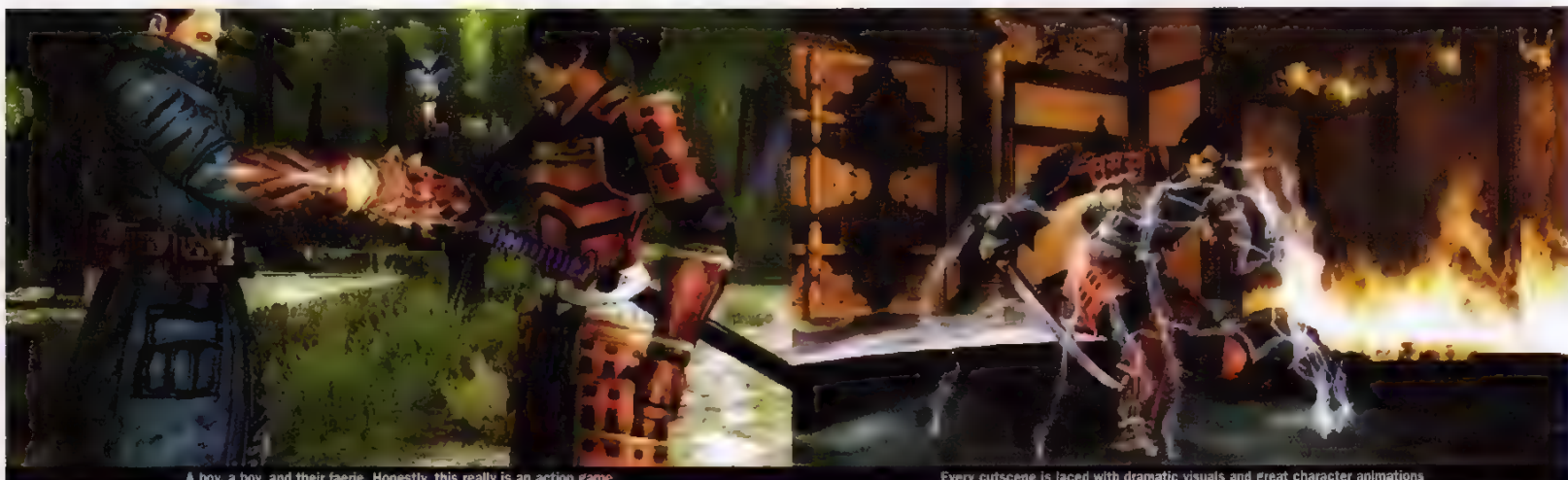
From an action standpoint, this is where *Demon Siege* differs the most from its predecessors – battles are frantic and laced with strategy. Although we didn't discover much in the way of combo attacks, both heroes fight differently and defeating adversaries depends on timing more than a wide array of attacks. Samanosuke's controls (with all weapons) offer two different blocks, an attack string, and the element-dependant special move. The Frenchman starts the game



The metal whip is so versatile – and it looks great with military blue

with a military-issued pistol, and he quickly switches from the glowing whip we've seen in many pictures to a metal-linked whip which also functions as a lance/sword. Jaques can use the whip for long-distance jumps and throwing enemies around the screen; but we also caught him trapping baddies, stepping on their chests, and finishing them off with the pistol – *Professional* style.

We'll get our hands on the full version in the near future, but having this time with the first third of the game made us (and should make you) quite antsy for *Demon Siege*'s May release.



A boy, a boy, and their faerie. Honestly, this really is an action game

Every cutscene is laced with dramatic visuals and great character animations

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER CAPCOM ■ DEVELOPER CAPCOM ■ RELEASE MAY



PLAYSTATION 2

# FINAL FANTASY XII

## OLD WORLD, NEW DIRECTION

**Since its unveiling** a few months ago, Final Fantasy XII has quickly become the talk of the town. With the game's producer/director Yasumi Matsuno making shocking comments about this Final Fantasy being quite unlike any before it, fans of the series have been flipping out and scouring the globe for details. As it turns out, the only people who are not talking about Final Fantasy XII are the good folks over at Square Enix. After much finagling, and a deal that resulted in the loss of Matt's soul, Game Informer managed to break Square Enix's pact of secrecy, and unearth a bevy of new information.

For those of you who have vested many days and nights into the Final Fantasy Tactics games, Final Fantasy XII is set in the same world of Ivalice. The information and images that have been released thus far don't necessarily fit into the context of the Tactics series. Hence, fans have speculated that we may be looking at an alternate reality or an interpretation of the Tactics games. In truth, we're actually looking at Ivalice in a different era before the ideals of human rights have been established. In this time, the Archadian Empire controls the continent of Valendia, and is in direct opposition against the Empire of Rozaria, which occupies the continent of Ordalia.

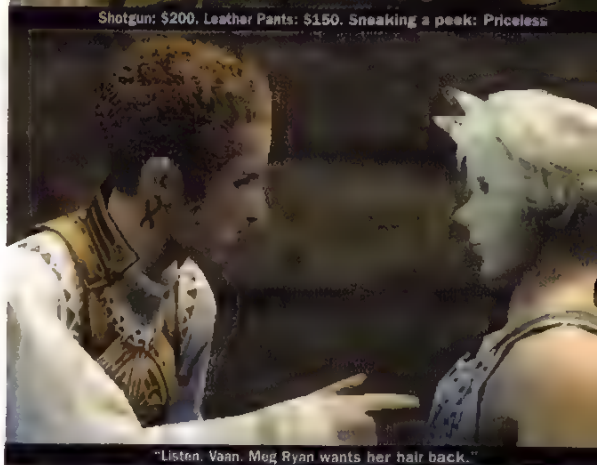
Matsuno dropped hints that suggested that airships might, in fact, be incorporated into different scenarios. Players will use them for transportation, but may run into battleships while en route. We're not talking about simple little hot air balloons, either. One of the central ships in the game measures in at roughly 340 meters in length. In comparison, the World War II battleship Yamato was only 260 meters long. More impressive yet, when stacked up against other airships in the game, the 340 meter vessel is only mid-sized! One can only speculate that Matsuno and company are considering a ship-versus-ship gameplay component similar to Skies of Arcadia.

The premise of the game also seems to fall in stride with Skies of Arcadia. As it turns out, Vaan, one of the leading characters in the player's party, longs to be an air pirate. His aspiration in life is to own an airship that he can use to escape the Archadian Empire. Joining Vaan and 19-year-old princess Ashe are two new adventurers: Balflear, a 22-year-old hume who is proficient with both gun and sword, and

Fran, a viera who is partnered with Balflear. This comes as quite a surprise, seeing that the viera usually don't mingle with other races.

Little has been said about the combat system, but Square did drop a tidbit about the world of Ivalice being heavily into mythology surrounding swords and stones. If the battle shot shows what we think it does (if you look in the lower right-hand corner at the three dots next to the character's Max MP), it appears players will be able to enhance their armaments using varying stones laced with effects.

While tentatively scheduled to release in Japan this summer, there's little chance of Final Fantasy XII coming stateside until 2005.



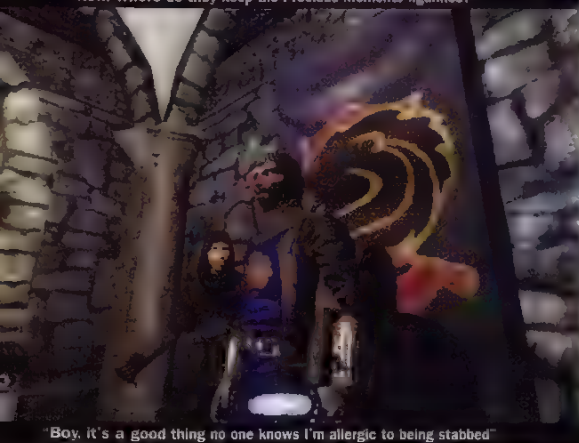
■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME  
 ■ **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX ■ **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX  
 ■ **RELEASE** SUMMER (JAPAN), TBA (U.S.)



All light sources are dynamic, from the castle's windows to the guard's torch



"Now, where do they keep the Precious Moments figurines?"



"Boy, it's a good thing no one knows I'm allergic to being stabbed"

XBOX | PC

# THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

## THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

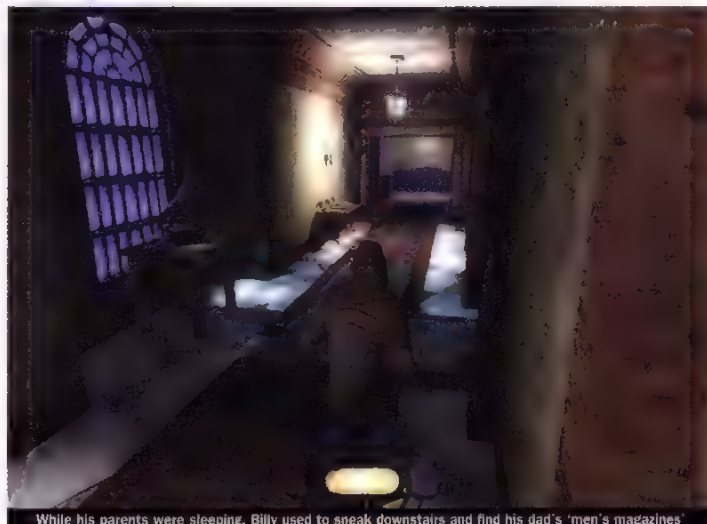
**Long before Sam** Fisher ever picked up his night vision goggles, there was another shadowy figure creeping through the darkness. Garrett, the cynical thief who starred in two PC adventures, perfected surliness and stealth back in the days when swords were the weapons of choice and torches lit the night. Who knows, maybe Sam Fisher is his direct descendant?

Garrett's new adventure may have similarities to Splinter Cell in its use of shadows and stealth, but it is more closely related to another hot Xbox title, namely *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. When original *Thief* developer Looking Glass Studios folded, *Deus Ex* developer Ion Storm was assigned to the property. Based on the same graphics engine as the sumptuous *Invisible War*, *Deadly Shadows* features some truly unbelievable, well, shadows. Garrett is going to need the darkness if he's going to survive; the *Thief* games have always been about staying hidden, avoiding combat, and making it out of tight spots with as much loot as possible. *Deadly Shadows* features the same core concept as the previous titles, but improves on them in a number of ways. For the first time, a third-person view is available, and can be switched to on the fly. But even in first person, Garrett will seem more real, thanks to what Ion Storm calls "body awareness." When Garrett performs an action in first person (such as picking a lock), you'll be able to see his arms carry out the task. *Deadly Shadows* will also feature normal mapping, Havok 2 physics, and full lip syncing for every character in order to create the most realistic experience possible.

The level of realism in *Deadly Shadows* doesn't stop with lighting and physics — every aspect of its

world has been taken into consideration. Since Garrett is a suspicious looking chap, guards will instantly suspect him of mischief, even in broad daylight. If the player gives a guard a solid reason to be alarmed, he will pursue Garrett until one of them is dead. And while Garrett tends to avoid confrontations, he's far from helpless. Along with the tools of his trade, he carries a bow with several types of arrows, a blackjack, and a dagger, which is perfect for slitting the throats of those he catches unaware. Of course, both the body and the blood need to be taken care of if he wants to avoid tipping off more guards.

In many ways, the *Thief* games helped create the stealth/action genre, and certainly influenced those that came after it. With all the innovation that is crammed into the third entry, that legacy of influence is sure to continue. *Deadly Shadows* looks amazing and is certain to bring the genre to exciting (but dark) new places.



While his parents were sleeping, Billy used to sneak downstairs and find his dad's 'men's magazines'

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER EIDOS INTERACTIVE ■ DEVELOPER ION STORM ■ RELEASE SPRING

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PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

# METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

## SNAKE PLAYS DRESS-UP

**The details surrounding** the story of Konami's upcoming installment in the Metal Gear Solid series are veiled in more secrecy and mystery than The Patriots themselves. Though still not divulging any plot-related tidbits, creator Hideo Kojima sat down at a recent event to shine some light on one of the key gameplay elements in this highly anticipated title.

The goal of "tactical espionage action" is to complete your objectives using stealth. In the previous games, this meant hiding in ventilation shafts and lurking around corners to avoid detection. Since portions of Snake Eater take place outside, there are few lockers and cardboard boxes to be found. To address this, Snake Eater will introduce a unique camouflage mechanic — Snake will need to find and wear several types of suits and facepaint to help him blend in with his environment.

Your level of cover is determined by your camouflage

index, a percentage in the top corner of the screen indicating how distinguishable you are to your enemies. If you try to hide up against a tree wearing the fire camo, you will have a low index and can count on attracting some attention. However, if you are wearing the woodland gear, along with black facepaint, your index will be close to 100 percent, making it easier to slip by enemies or gain a surprise attack.

Even if you are wearing the perfect attire for the situation, there are still variables that can affect your cover. An enemy's distance from you figures into the equation, as does whether or not you are moving or making noise (which can actually make your index go negative).

Because of the fairly uniform environments in the previous MGS titles, this gameplay device would have been difficult to implement before now. But due to the variety of surroundings, ranging from forests to caves to



Not all camouflage is created equal. Depending on your surroundings, some suits provide better cover than others.

grassy plains, there will be a number of opportunities to experiment with the terrain and find multiple approaches to situations in true MGS style.

Much like the famous dog tag promotion from Sons of Liberty, Konami is giving fans a chance to contribute to the game in the form of a camouflage design contest. The winners will have the honor of seeing Snake, international modeling sensation, donning their creations in game. Along with fan-designed duds, there will also be additional suits and facepaint that will be made available for download using the PS2's upcoming hard drive.

The new stealth dynamic may sound more Sam Fisher than Solid Snake, but given Kojima's track record with this series, we'll just have to trust that he knows what he's doing. After all, people warmed up to Raiden eventually, right? What? Uh-oh...

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN ■ **RELEASE** FALL

First Snake loses a contact deep in the jungle primeval...



...then he tries to disguise himself as a forest fire, with little success

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# MERCENARIES

## CARNAGE FOR HIRE

**When you hear** the name Pandemic these days, the first thing that comes to mind is Full Spectrum Warrior, the studio's upcoming military training simulator turned console game. However, it is also flexing some of its muscle in an entirely different area with the upcoming title Mercenaries. Where FSW focuses on realistic strategy, Mercenaries will emphasize over-the-top action; complete with theft, explosions, and killing for money.

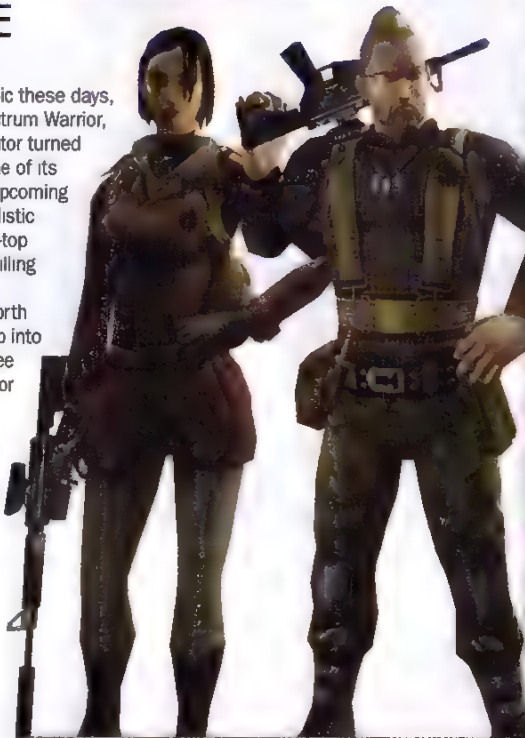
There is a volatile situation developing in North Korea, and as a mercenary, it your job to jump into the mix...for a price. You have a choice of three characters: a male Swede, a male American, or a female Brit. Each one has unique strengths and weaknesses to bring to the missions, making the experience different depending on which merc you choose. One time through the game might be filled with punching and rockets, and another time with sneaking and subtlety.

The game centers around capturing the individuals who are fueling the flames of conflict in North Korea, referred to as the "deck of 52." Each of the game's 52 missions focuses on capturing one of these threats, assigned a number and a suit from a deck of cards. Ultimately, you work your way up the suits, capturing subordinates and gathering information until you catch their bosses (the face cards), and eventually the head honcho, represented by the ace of spades.

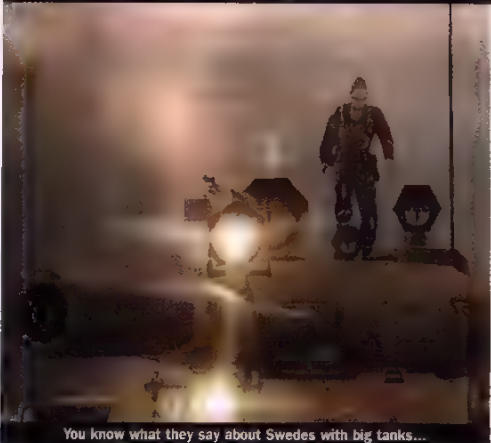
The order you take on the missions, as well as how you complete them, is wide open. Mercenaries provides a level of freedom akin to Grand Theft Auto; the environments are huge and interactive, with few restrictions on what you can and can't do. It is possible to complete missions for one faction until you get bored with them, then steal a Hummer and cruise over to another area to start working for an opposing organization. You can even order an air strike on your former employers if you're particularly vindictive. As a mercenary, your alliances are tenuous at best.

The game features over 20 accessible vehicles, such as helicopters and Jeeps, as well as over 30 weapons ranging from shotguns to rocket launchers. The creators want to put a special focus on creativity in problem solving, so they are giving the players as many options as possible. If you run into a barricade, you may just want to launch a missile at it, but you could also try to plow through it with a tank or simply fly over in a helicopter. Each way has its risks and advantages that the player will have to weigh before charging forward.

There's no question that this game will provide an exceptional amount of freedom and variety, but we'll have to wait until fall to find out whether or not Mercenaries will be able to make a name for itself in a world that has already seen a few too many GTA imitators.



TrafficCopter8 reports clear driving despite the weather



You know what they say about Swedes with big tanks...



PREVIEWS



You'll need to know when to use vehicles...



...and when to destroy them

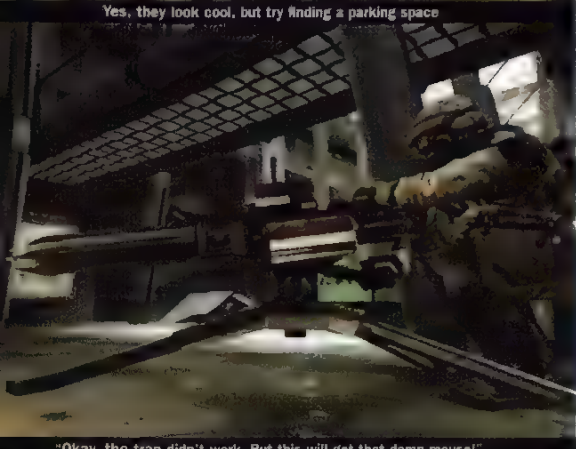
■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER LUCASARTS ■ DEVELOPER PANDEMIC STUDIOS ■ RELEASE FALL



The ISA: Visit exotic places, meet new people, and kill them



Yes, they look cool, but try finding a parking space



"Okay, the trap didn't work. But this will get that damn mouse!"

PLAYSTATION 2

# KILLZONE

THE LOOKS THAT KILL



**Bullets rip through** the air, screaming past your face. Bombs explode behind you, showering debris around and echoing in your ears. You glance to the side just quickly enough to see your buddy go down in a hail of gunfire. War, as they say, is truly hell.

This is the feeling that Sony hopes to evoke with its highly anticipated new FPS, *Killzone*. Despite the sci-fi trappings, *Killzone* is being touted as the grittiest, most realistic shooter in history. Developer Guerilla Games based the title's 11 stages on real-life historical conflicts, from the trench battles of World War I to the guerilla combat of Vietnam. Although it is set in the near future, don't expect to see any laser guns or spaceships. All of *Killzone*'s 26 weapons are patterned after today's existing military technology. Combined with the game's incredibly detailed and realistic graphics, these factors make Sony's goal of authentic combat seem like a reality.

In *Killzone*, gamers will be able to choose from four different playable characters, each with their own unique skills and abilities. You will stick with the same character for the most of the game, but you won't be alone on the

battlefield. The other three characters will head to the front with you, and they will both help you and attempt to achieve their own unique goals. While *Killzone* won't feature traditional squad controls, working together with your team will still be essential.

The story mode chronicles the tale of the heroic ISA forces as they attempt to hold off the evil Helghast organization from overrunning an area known as the Vecta colony. As exciting as this mode is sure to be, the multiplayer action may be an even bigger draw. Online mode has been confirmed, as has a co-op option. Details on the online mode are still scarce, but Sony has said that the game will feature "battlefield mode," although what this means is still unknown. Whatever it is, trash talking will be a part of it, as USB headset support is also confirmed.

Based on what we've heard, as well as these gorgeous screens, we're pretty excited about what *Killzone* will have to offer when it hits late this year. Will it invoke the grit and gloom that Sony claims? Will Halo finally be dethroned as the king of console shooters? These things remain to be seen, but you can bet we'll keep a close watch on this one.



"Hmm... something warm and wet is trickling down my leg."



Obviously, this is a very family-friendly game

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA BROADBAND) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** GUERRILLA GAMES ■ **RELEASE** WINTER



NOW PLAYING



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

# SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

## BACK IN BLACK

Once again, Sam Fisher's latest adventure will debut on the Xbox. But have no fear, PlayStation 2 and GameCube owners – Pandora Tomorrow has only been delayed for those systems in order to ensure that the versions are as similar to the big black box's as possible. We had a chance to test drive the Xbox incarnation, and if the delay helps the other two releases turn out this well, then we're all for it.

Back in December, we reported that this title featured both single-player and multiplayer modes. After finally trying them both out, we can say definitively that each mode is incredible. While they both feature the same jaw-dropping visuals, the feel of the gameplay in the two modes is so different that Ubisoft could have released it as two separate titles – and they both would have sold like mad. But we're glad Ubi decided against that, because as one cohesive package, Pandora Tomorrow looks like a sure-fire blockbuster.

The single-player campaign features everything great about the original Splinter Cell, while also doing away with some of that title's flaws. The visuals are even more darkly gorgeous than before, the story is intelligent and mature, and the controls are perfect. But gone is the relentless difficulty of the original Xbox release – it's still a challenging game, but not overly frustrating like the first. Also improved is the imprecise aiming (although headshots still don't seem to work like they should), and the enemy guards seem smarter. The stages are much more open as well, and there are also greater opportunities to use the tricks in Sam's arsenal. The underused split jump that debuted in the first title is now a very helpful trick.

Anything that Sam can do, his little pals in the online game can do as well. The Shadow Nets, the spies that star in the multiplayer scenarios, are every bit as slippery as Sam, and even have a few tricks of their own. Which is good, because their foes (the mercs) are heavily armed. When playing as a spy, each stage has goals for you to accomplish, while the mercs have only one: stop you from meeting yours. Since you can only play against human opponents in multiplayer (AI bots are not an option), the matches are especially tense. Toe-to-toe, the spies almost always lose to the mercs, so stealth is even more critical than it is in single-player.

Both gameplay modes are striking displays of creativity, and push the stealth/action genre to exciting new places. Anyone who enjoyed the original Splinter Cell should love Pandora Tomorrow, and it will undoubtedly bring the series legions of new fans. Xbox enthusiasts will be delighted to be the first to grab this hot title, and for PS2 and GameCube fans, it's certainly worth the wait.

## PLAYING FOR THE OTHER TEAM

The Shadow Nets have gotten a lot of attention, but their foes the mercs have stayed pretty much in the shadows. Playing as the mercs is very similar to Rainbow Six 3, and Splinter Cell's world is equally gorgeous in first-person. As cool as the spies are, the mercs seem a little more powerful. They are equipped with assault rifles, goggles with three vision modes, and a fine selection of anti-spy gadgets. These three shots illustrate the world through the eyes of the bad guy.



Teamwork is essential to completing the Shadow Nets' online missions



The Shadow Nets can be hard to find in the darkness...

...but will almost always lose a head-to-head confrontation

The Shadow Nets will appear on radar if caught by a security camera

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE FOR XBOX AND PS2, GC TBD) ■ **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 16 (XBOX), TBD (PS2 AND GAMECUBE)



PLAYSTATION 2

# MONSTER HUNTER

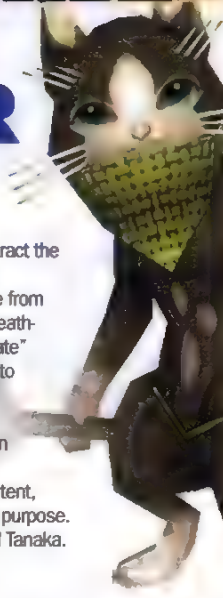
## DANGEROUS GAME

**For those of us** who are tired of capturing critters that are tiny, cute, and repeatedly mumble their own names, Capcom's *Monster Hunter* will soon provide a hearty online-enabled alternative. Imagine hunting at Jurassic Park with your friends, but take out the sissy scientists and kids, and replace them with warriors who wield swords so huge they'd make Cloud blush.

Tsuyoshi Tanaka, head of Production Studio 1, explained that even though the game can be enjoyed alone, "it is aimed at providing a rewarding online experience." There is a focus on cooperation and strategy among the four players – each situation presents new challenges and new solutions. In one mission you might need to sneak up and attack a monster, while another

might require two party members to distract the beast while the other two steal its egg.

The monsters you will encounter range from vicious little raptors to enormous, fire-breathing dragons. Though there is one "ultimate" creature, encountering it is not required to complete the game. In fact, due to the quest-based gameplay, it is difficult to define a single overriding objective. Given the title's numerous maps, character customization, and expanded online content, players will be free to discover their own purpose. "There is no one goal in the game," said Tanaka. "It is about finding a goal for yourself."



■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 1 ■ **RELEASE** FALL



SHE'S THE ARTISTIC TYPE, THOUGH HER ARTS ARE PURELY MARTIAL.

CYGIRLS

09:27:36



PLAYSTATION 2

# HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!

## BACK TO THE LINKS

For those that like golf, but appreciate things a bit on the zany side (admit it, some golf titles can be drier than crackers and sand), the popular Hot Shots Golf series is coming back to your PS2. Hot Shots Golf Fore features everything that has put the series on the map, plus much more. Fore will offer the same excellent game mechanics and physics as the previous outings, plus enhanced graphics, 34 playable characters, 15 courses, an easy mode, and online support.

Several old characters will be returning, including Johnny and T-Bone, along with many new golfers. Some of the as-yet-unnamed characters include a surfer, a skater, and a female import racer. While the golfers will retain their familiar look, the courses will be noticeably improved. Trees now sway in the wind, new

weather and lighting effects have been added, and courses will feature more animation. Nearby roads will be alive with cars and water will flow more naturally.

As exciting as the new graphical enhancements are, the truly monumental addition to the series is online functionality. The exact details of this mode are still in development, but two-player head-to-head matches are confirmed. Sony is trying to implement a four-player online mode as well, but this may not make it to the final version. Real-time tournaments with up to 30 players are planned, as is a leader board. Fore will support keyboard chat, and voice chat is being discussed.

Also in the mix are several features returning to the series. Miniature golf mode returns, as does the Hot Shots Points system, which allows players to unlock



Mini-golf is confirmed, but we're still waiting to see if there will be giant clown heads involved.

new golf gear, characters, and courses. Tour, Tournament, VS, and Training modes are all back as well, along with an easy mode designed for Hot Shots newbies. It features a simplified swing mechanic, which allows players to hit a perfect shot every time while learning how to use the swing meter. This mode will appeal to those who never played a golf game before, and should earn the already-popular series even more fans. Break out your gaudy plaid pants this summer, because the Hot Shots Golf Fore courses will be the place to be.

### GOLF GOSSIP

Although Hot Shots Golf Fore already sounds like a fully loaded title, there may be even more sweetness on the way. A little bird tells us that Sony superstars Jak and Ratchet will most likely be included as hidden playable characters. The same avian tattletale also let it slip that a PSP version may be on the way for mobile golf madness.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (ONLINE TBA) ■ **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ  
 ■ **RELEASE** SUMMER





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# BURNOUT 3

## ENTER THE CRUMPLE ZONE

Months ago, it would have been easy to imagine EA's Need for Speed and Criterion's Burnout series rewiring their engines at each other in an attempt to get off the line the fastest, like a pair of jugheads filled with testosterone and gasoline. Thanks to the almighty dollar, however, EA has usurped the need for competition between these two franchises known for defining the phrase "edge of your seat" by buying the Burnout series. But instead of taking it in-house like it has done with other franchises, the company smartly knew that some things were better left alone, and Criterion is back at the development helm for Burnout 3.

Burnout 2's sense of speed was spectacular, and the Crash mode (where you racked up points for creating the biggest mess of steel and rubber you could) was lauded for its sheer spectacle. That's nothing. The developer wants to outdo itself by basically integrating the spirit of Crash mode into the normal course of playing (although it will still be its own

segment). How? By adding more traffic, but also by tweaking the goal of the races so that crashing into and sabotaging the five other racers on the track is the norm. While you are still rewarded for chaining driving moves together, you'll also gain points and boosts for riding roughshod over your opponents. Augmenting this highway to hell is a new particle system and an emphasis on making the cars more damageable than ever. You'll also notice your surroundings having gotten a graphical bump, too.

One of our concerns with Burnout 2 was that the Career portion was very linear. This has changed completely, with this third installment containing more depth as well as branching paths. Moreover, online has been added – which includes Crash mode – making this a fully fleshed-out title similar to the rest of those in the EA stable. With Criterion still in control of the series, the partnership between the two companies is making Burnout 3 a crash you can't take your eyes away from.

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYERS VIA PS2 ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER



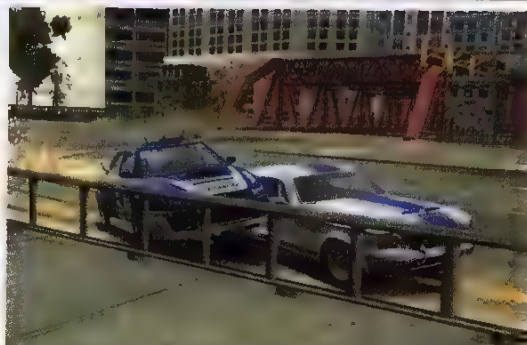
Burnout 3's new focus literally puts the fun of Crash mode in the career portion



Criterion redid almost all of the game's visuals



Picking a good race line and taking out the competition is twice as good



"None shall pass!"



SHE'D LOVE TO  
 TAKE YOU OUT.  
 FROM 20 METERS.

EA GAMES

071864

## PREVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED

# LA PUCELLE: TACTICS

HAND-DRAWN HAPPINESS

Last year, developer Nippon Ichi rocked the PS2 with the stellar *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness*. Here in 2004, it's preparing another feast for us poor strategy-starved gamers. *La Pucelle: Tactics* looks quite similar to *Disgaea*, but with several different game mechanics and a bit more story thrown into the mix.

Character growth occurs organically during battle—for instance, if you defeat an enemy with a sword, your attack power will increase; while if you drop a baddie with magic, your spell effectiveness will improve. This should give players the ability to create whatever kind of party they wish, with whichever characters are handy.

As for the combat, *La Pucelle* will follow the same approach as *Disgaea*, but with some twists. Players will be able to use their powers of exorcism to purify Dark Portals (which will stop foes from appearing), as well as enemies (to turn them to your side). In addition to this, skilled characters can use the energy from a Dark Portal to call upon a deity to descend onto the battlefield and perform a miracle—a spectacular effect, such as healing all of your warriors and beating the heck out of lots of enemies.

With over 100 hours of gameplay and multiple endings, strategy fans should be able to get much more than their money's worth. In May when *La Pucelle* goes to retail,



Ain't nothin' wrong with some old-school 2D sprites



PC

# TRIBES: VENGEANCE

STRIKING THE EMPIRE BACK

When Sierra closed down the development studio that created the first two Tribes games, the future of the brand seemed uncertain, to say the least. However, there is no reason to fear the worst. Irrational Games, creators of the acclaimed *Freedom Force*, is working overtime to resurrect Tribes for 2004.

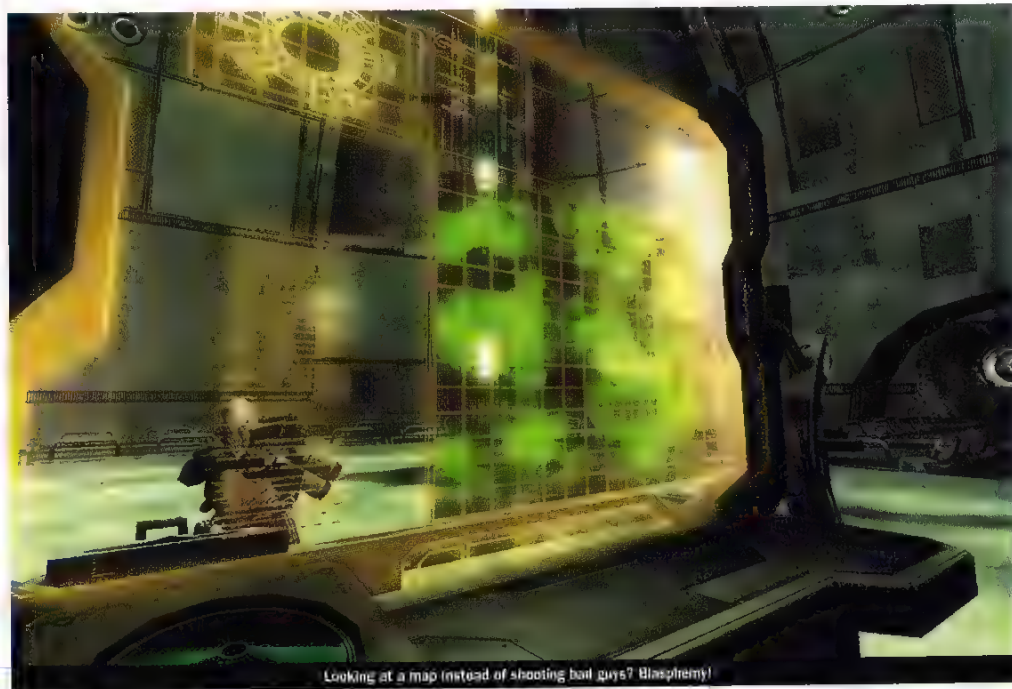
In a first for the series, *Vengeance* will feature a fully-functional single player experience, fleshing out the story begun in *Starsiege: Tribes* and *Tribes 2*. The events in *Vengeance* take place well before those games, and highlight the role of the Empire in the Tribes fiction. Additionally, Irrational has cut the number of Tribes available to players from four to three, and are focusing on not only making them look unique, but play differently as well.

Even within a Tribe, though, there are many ways to customize your warrior. You start with one of three armor

types (light, medium, or heavy), then place your choice of the four packs on top of it. Then, when you've got those things picked, you are able to choose which weapons you'll be carrying. Ten implements of destruction are confirmed, though we wouldn't be surprised at all if that number grows by ship date.

In order to make gameplay more accessible to newer players, the control scheme and overall game mechanics are being overhauled. Streamlining is the key word here—irrational is committed to making actions intuitive and concepts easy to understand, without sacrificing any of the complexity that veterans love.

From the footage we've seen, it looks like *Vengeance* is well on the way to becoming one of the most distinctive FPSs of 2004. Because really, how can you go wrong with jetpacks and energy rifles?



Looking at a map (instead of shooting hail guys? Blasphemy!)

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG ■ PUBLISHER MASTER GAMES ■ DEVELOPER NIPPON ICHI ■ RELEASE MAY

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA LAN OR INTERNET) ■ PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL ■ DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL GAMES ■ RELEASE 4TH QUARTER 2004

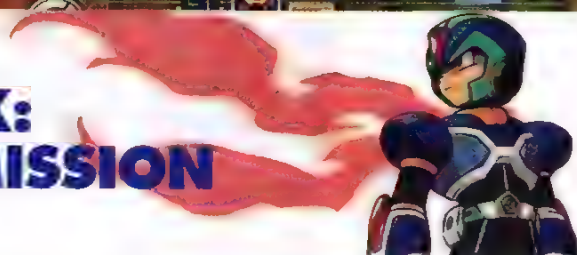


2 GIRLS.  
2 WORLDS.  
1 HARDCORE  
MISSION.

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

# MEGA MAN X: COMMAND MISSION

NEITHER 2D NOR ACTION



**Capcom has a somewhat** unsuccessful history in moving the Blue Bomber away from his side-scrolling roots. Mega Man X7 (PS2) was an execrable effort that most fans of the series would as soon forget. Not one to be fazed by such setbacks, Capcom will be bringing us a Mega Man RPG, titled Command Mission, this summer.

Given the confusing nature of the Mega Man X story, it'll be interesting to see how it plays out in Command Mission. Over the first seven installments of the series, no really cohesive plot has emerged – about all that can be said is that X and Zero are good, Sigma is bad, and Zero has some unexplained connection to the original Dr. Wily. Seeing as it is an RPG, let's hope that Command Mission features a little more substance (and proper translation, for the love of all that's holy!).

Command Mission certainly has potential. Creating a team of three heroes from seven playable characters and powering them up RPG-style, surrounded by all of the cel-shaded beauty we know Capcom's artists are capable of, sounds awesome. A brand-new combat framework called the Cross Order System, which looks like a kind of turn-order display (though its functionality is unknown at this time), should help to distinguish this within the genre.

Four new Reploids will be joining X, Zero, and Axl in their quest to restore peace to an island ravaged by rioting. Of the new characters, one has healing abilities; another wields a huge axe; the third has ninja skills. The final robot – well, we're kind of ashamed to say it, but the only information we could get out of Japan about him is that he's got playing cards. Let's just hope that he's as cool as Gambit or Setzer.



2 DISCS • ADVENTURES



**CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON:**  
ASKA, WITH HER LETHAL NINJA SKILLS - OR ICE, A FIREARMS EXPERT WITH NERVES OF STEEL. THEN TAKE THE FIGHT AGAINST EVIL FROM THE REAL WORLD INTO CYBERSPACE, WHERE THE RULES ARE RADICALLY DIFFERENT - BUT THE ACTION'S EVERY BIT AS HARDCORE.



CYBIRLS

PlayStation 2



**MATURE**  
Blood  
Strong Language  
Suggestive Themes  
Violence

KONAMI

WWW.KONAMI.COM/USA

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ PUBLISHER CAPCOM ■ DEVELOPER CAPCOM ■ RELEASE SUMMER

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# REVIEWS



**Fight Night 2004**  
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**MLB 2005**  
pg. 98



## ANDY

**Handle:** The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, Conan In Canada, KG4MVP **Dislikes:** When TiVo Cuts Off The End Of A Program Or Suggests That I Watch Oprah, Kobe Bryant, When SCEA Doesn't Approve *Metal Slug 3*, That Joe Claims Funyuns Have No Taste In His Sonic Battle Review **Current Favorite Games:** *Ninja Gaiden*, *Unreal Tournament 2k4*, *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*

Now retired from the rock scene, Andy spends endless hours locked in his home office, enjoying the benefits of high definition television and surround sound far away from those scary things he has often heard referred to as people. A longtime fan of Metroid, Andy has been reviewing video games professionally since the days of the 8-bit NES. While a big sports fan in real life, Andy isn't the first to line up for sports titles, but is always willing to put in the extra hours to play a good RPG or strategy game.



## REINER

**Handle:** The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** *Farscape* (The Draddest Show Ever!), Greg Maddux Signing With The Cubs (World Series Here We Come!), Spicy Meatballs (Yummy!), 989 Sports Coming Around **Dislikes:** Kevin Smith (You're A Nerd, Not Nancy Meyers!), George Steinbrenner (For Obvious Reasons), The Possibility Of Not Having An NHL Season Next Year **Current Favorite Games:** *Ninja Gaiden*, *MVP Baseball 2004*, *Maio & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, *Fight Night 2004*, *Jak 3*, *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*

Reiner considers himself the biggest Star Wars fan in the world. Along with his impressive collection of Star Wars action figures, he has seen the trilogy 702 times. A fan of all game types, role-playing games are his strong suit. In his nine years as a professional gamer, Reiner has achieved the impossible. Penetrating the pixel boundary, he not only plays games, he's in them. Thus far, Reiner has appeared in *Dragon Force*, *Alundra*, *Perfect Dark*, and *XIII*. He will also be featured as a playable character in another forthcoming release.



## MATT

**Handle:** The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Puzzle, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *Playing My First Show With The New Band*, *Ender's Game*, *Lies They Were Wrong*, *So We Drowned*, Brian Wilson's *Smile* Concerts **Dislikes:** MPR, The Economy, Not Having An iPod, Mel Gibson **Current Favorite Games:** *Fight Night 2004*, *Jak II*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*

While record collecting, watching reality television, and playing video games might sound like a state of retarded adolescence, Matt manages to scrap together an almost meaningful existence out of these activities. His encyclopedic knowledge of pop culture is either amazing or annoying, depending on how close your desk is to his. Less esoteric than his colleagues, Matt prefers traditional action and platform games.



## KATO

**Handle:** The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Brian Wilson Finally Letting Us Hear *Smile*, *The Apprentice*, Motown's Funk Brothers, *The Office*, *Crap Towns: The 50 Worst Places To Live In The U.K.*, Larry David **Dislikes:** Protection Missions In Games (Let 'Em Die I Say), Mel Gibson, Jimmy Fallon (You're Not A Rockstar And You're Not Funny) **Current Favorite Games:** *Fight Night 2004*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *MVP Baseball 2004*, *Colin McRae Rally 4*, *Winning Eleven 7*

When not buying copious amounts of records, Kato can be found exercising good taste, feeding the goats, and trying in vain to update his wardrobe into the 21st century. Like other young men of his generation, he quickly found out that the one true real world application of good grades was the free arcade tokens that were given out at as reward. With allegiance to none, he takes on every game with an equal eye.



## LISA

**Handle:** La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Puzzle, RPGs, Action/Platform, Horror **Interests:** Japanese Capsule Toys, Johnny Depp Actually Winning Awards For *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, Books On iPod **Dislikes:** Only Offending The Special Edition Versions Of *Star Wars* On The Upcoming DVD Set (I Want My Ewok Happy Song And Han Did Shoot First, For Crap's Sake) **Current Favorite Games:** *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*, *Crash Bandicoot: Twinsanity*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Colin McRae Rally 4*, *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life*

Barring a brief and ill advised "I want to be popular, so I'll stop playing games" phase in late junior high, Lisa has been subjecting her friends to drawn out boss battles since age 8. She has been known to wax philosophically about why Jigglypuff is desperately under-appreciated and wish that some "big" games were more fun, even if that means less pretty.



## JEREMY

**Handle:** Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Adventure, Fighting, RPGs **Interests:** *Let's Get Ready To Crumble* By The Russian Futurists, *The Apprentice*, *The Office*, The Books Of David Sedaris, *Broken Lizard's Club Dread* **Dislikes:** The Staggering Amount Of Reality TV I Have Been Watching, The Janet Jackson Nipple Uproar And Other Equally Stupid Things In The News **Current Favorite Games:** *Ninja Gaiden*, *The Suffering*, *Dead Man's Hand*, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*

Obsessed with anything on a shiny silver disc, Jeremy fanatically collects video games, music, and movies. When not buying bigger media storage systems or filling his mind with useless trivia, Jeremy likes to write silly books, short stories, and comics that no one ever reads. Although he will never be able to stop himself from buying new games, Jeremy firmly believes the best system of all time was the Super Nintendo.



## ADAM

**Handle:** The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, RPGs, Strategy, Fighting **Interests:** Fully Embracing My Dorkdom, The Pantages Theater, Companies Recognizing Their Mod Communities, Folk Music Shows **Dislikes:** Lawsuits Against Gaming Journalists (Infinium Labs, I'm Looking At You), Underpowered Graphics Cards (MX Means Mostly Useless), Derek Jeter (No Really, He's A Good Defensive Shortstop) **Current Favorite Games:** *Unreal II*, *Wars And Warriors: Joan Of Arc*, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*

Despite his waning attention span, every so often a game comes out that will completely dominate Adam's life for several months. Between these introverted periods of seclusion and obsession, he has been known to switch platforms, genres, and games with blinding speed, searching for his next true love. When Nintendo thumb inevitably forces him to turn to other pursuits, Adam can often be seen engrossed in the consumption of any sort of media, from newspapers to film to comic books and radio.



## JOE

**Handle:** The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Tom Waits, *Witch Hunter Robin*, *The Daily Show*, Rage **Dislikes:** Your Favorite Band, Things That Are Less Than 80% Awesome, Ordering The Special (What? Do I Look Like, A Champ?) **Current Favorite Games:** *Ninja Gaiden*, *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*, *Einhänder*, R-type: *Final Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner*

Waging a constant war against reality, Joe is always on the lookout for a good escape. Apart from gaming, Joe's primary weapons in this battle are reading, watching anime, and playing D&D, where he is currently a halfling rogue with a tendency to contract debilitating illnesses. Joe plays his games into the ground, mercilessly conquering every sidequest and minigame, and he will continue to do so until real-life has more save points, plot twists, and attack buttons.

Our crack (or crackhead) we can never decide which review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the numbers can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

Game Informer's rating system ranges from 0 to 10, and is similar to school grading. 7 is average, 9 and above is exemplary work, 5 and below is a failure. Aside from concept, entertainment, graphics, playability, sound, and replay value (all explained to the right), other factors that influence a game's final score are how much game you get for your money and how all the game's elements come together.

<b>10</b>	Outstanding. One of the best games of all time, if not THE best game of all time. This game is virtually flawless, and thus this rating is rarely given out.
<b>9</b>	Superb. Fans of the genre should definitely enjoy this game, but even those who don't normally like this type of game may find themselves getting hooked.
<b>8</b>	Great. Still a great game, but arguably so. It may not be the best ever, but there's enough to keep your fingers wrapped around the controller for some time.
<b>7</b>	Average. Unless you're a fledgling gamer, you've probably seen everything this game has to offer before. Still, just checking it out won't ruin your weekend.
<b>6</b>	Limited appeal. There are always a few people who will fall in love with a game of this caliber, but for the most part, those playing it will be yearning for something more.
<b>5</b> below	Garbage. From this point down, it's just a matter of how much of a failure the game is. The lower the score, the more you're hating life for playing it.

## CONCEPT

What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

## GRAPHICS

How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

## SOUND

Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

## PLAYABILITY

Basically, the easier to learn to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in making a game

## REPLAY VALUE

The longevity of the title.

- **High** - You'll still be popping this game out years from now.
- **Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- **Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- **Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- **Low** - A single play through is plenty.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 17 and older.
	Content suitable only for adults.
	Product is awaiting final rating.



When All Games Aren't Created Equal





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**Breakdown**  
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**GC**  
**Harvest Moon**  
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**PC**  
**Syberia II**  
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**HANDHELD**  
**Pitfall: The Lost Expedition**  
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## NEWBIE CHEAT SHEET

For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).

**1080i** - A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced.

**480p** - Progressive scanning, this option ("p"=progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i (=interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

**720p** - A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format.

**action** - A term we use for games like Zone of the Enders and Gauntlet.

**adventure** - A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.

**AI** - Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent.

**board** - A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mario Party.

**bump mapping** - A technique where varying light effects simulate depth on textures.

**cel shading** - A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels.

**CG** - Computer-Generated graphics.

**E3** - Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games.

**fighting** - A term we use for games like Street Fighter and Dead or Alive.

**FMV** - Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene.

**FPS** - Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Doom, GoldenEye, and Unreal Tournament.

**frame rate** - The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement.

**frontend** - A game's menus and options.

**GBA** - Game Boy Advance.

**GBC** - Game Boy Color.

**GC** - GameCube.

**HDTV** - High Definition Television.

**isometric** - Three-quarters top-down view, like StarCraft or Red Alert 2.

**ISP** - Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet.

**jaggies** - Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight.

**LAN** - Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay.

**minigame** - A small, simple game within a larger one.

**motion-capture** - Using human models and infrared cameras to record movement for game animation. Also mo-cap.

**motion blur** - Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed.

**N64** - Nintendo 64.

**NES** - Nintendo Entertainment System.

**NPC** - Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.

**particle effects** - Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.

**PKer** - Player Killer. This is a person who thrives on killing newbie or vulnerable characters in MMORPGs or shooting their teammates in games like Counter-Strike.

**platform** - A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot.

**pop-up** - When onscreen objects, usually distant, suddenly appear.

**PS2** - Sony PlayStation 2.

**PSone** - Sony PlayStation 1.

**puzzle** - A term we use for games like Tetris and Chu Chu Rocket.

**racing** - A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.

**RPG** - Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior.

**shooter** - A term we use for games like Mars Madness and Gradius.

**SNES** - Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

**sports** - A term we use for games like Madden NFL.

**strategy** - A term we use for games like Command & Conquer and Fallout Tactics.

**third-party** - Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.

**Zososity** - The state of having money, yet no cash.



# NINJA GAIDEN

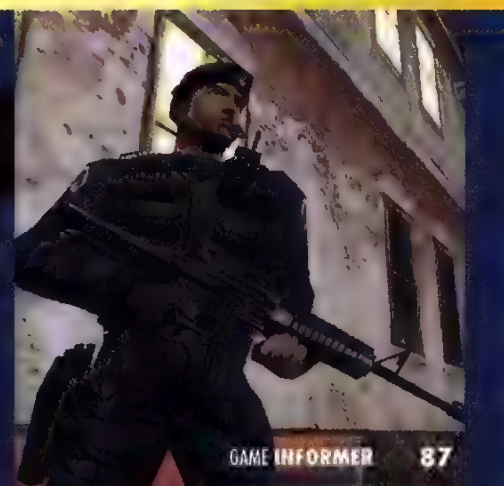
## GAME OF THE MONTH NINJA GAIDEN

Team Ninja's knowledge of fighting games is in full force in Ninja Gaiden. The ways in which you can slice and dice your foes is nearly endless. Whether you're going toe to toe with rival ninjas, fighting for your life against a gigantic slug beast, or pulling out your bow to snipe enemies on a ridge, this game delivers action in heavy and unforgettable doses. Find out our verdict on one of the most anticipated Xbox games to date! page 102



## GAME OF THE MONTH COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

It may not be the most revolutionary title around, but anyone who tries to say that Counter-Strike isn't a heck of a fun game is probably somebody you shouldn't be listening to. With a brand-new AI to power computer-controlled opponents (bots) and lots of tweaks to make Counter-Strike a smoother experience than ever before, Condition Zero is here to remind us where exactly those 500 hours of our lives went. And then sneak up 500 more. page 108





"...a title that may well change the way you think about boxing games"

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

# FIGHT NIGHT 2004

THE BOXER REBELLION

THE BOTTOM LINE



A good defense is often the best offense



Boxers display cuts and bruises on their faces

## The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

I think you'll begin to see a pattern developing as we hand out The Edge in EA Sports products in the coming year. Here's the deal: as usual, the Xbox version of Fight Night boasts graphics better than those of its PS2 counterpart, with smoother-running cutscenes, beefier character models, and improved texturing. The PS2, as usual (at least with EA Sports products) has the advantage of online play, which we are happy to report is quite impressive. There's no room for lag or hiccups in the lightning-quick sport of boxing, and we found that playing two-player over a broadband connection was virtually indistinguishable from duking it out on the same console. Impressive.

A few years ago, I reviewed a game called Victorious Boxers: Ippo's Road to Glory. It was a little weird, way too Japanese for the American market, and not nearly polished enough to really be a strong contender. However, it did contain a hint of things to come in its control scheme, which allowed you to twist and sway your boxer's torso with the left analog stick. Leave it to EA Sports to take this seed and nurture it into a title that may well change the way you think about boxing games. Much in the same way the powerhouse publisher has reinvented its golf and baseball franchises, Fight Night 2004 (the company decided to drop the Knockout Kings brand name) succeeds in creating a completely new formula for the sweet science.

To a large degree, with the exception of some special punches, face buttons are a thing of the past. Nearly all of your in-ring moves and blows are performed with the analog sticks. It's an amazing system, one that accurately mimics the fluid motions of the real-life sport. To perform a right-hand uppercut, you simply swing the right analog down, then around and up. Jabs and hooks function in the same intuitive manner.

This new control definitely requires a big adjustment on the part of the player. I lost my first five matches, and was getting a more than a little frustrated (don't be scared to go down to

Easy difficulty while you're learning). Then, as if a switch had been hit, the whole thing instantly made sense. Suddenly, I was bobbing and weaving, sticking and moving like an accomplished pugilist – me, whose real-life boxing experience is limited to getting beat up by my little sister. The AI will really push you to develop your skills, as it forces you to actually box – covering up and wisely picking your openings. Attempt to brawl, and you will be on the canvas in no time flat. I applaud what the development team has accomplished in Fight Night 2004, and look forward to future improvements to this already impressive package.

And there is significant room for improvement. The career and create-a-boxer modes, while featuring a good variety of unlockables and clothing options, don't really match EA titles like Tiger Woods, Madden, or even NASCAR in terms of depth. Also, there are too many holes in its line-up of classic boxers (Larry Holmes and Oscar De La Hoya, among others, are MIA). On the gameplay side, I found the heavy bag training drill to be much harder than the others, sometimes resulting in my boxer having somewhat unbalanced attributes. Still, this is an exemplary first effort in a new series, one that I suspect will become a favorite of gamers in the years to come. — MATT

■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIS PS2 ONLINE) ■ PUBLISHER EA SPORTS ■ DEVELOPER ELECTRONIC ARTS  
 ■ RELEASE MARCH 22



You'll engage in a number of training exercises to boost your boxer's stats



Rag doll physics are used to create some awesome knockdowns

- **Concept:** Reinvent the boxing genre with a brilliant all-analog control scheme
- **Graphics:** Very, very nice. The accurate body and face models get marred with real damage
- **Sound:** Crunk, crunkity, crunk! If you like ominous beats and lotsa Dirty South hollerin', you'll be in heaven
- **Playability:** It takes some getting used to, but after a while the control becomes second nature
- **Entertainment:** Extremely entertaining, breathing new life into the boxing genre
- **Replay Value:** High

## SECOND OPINION

Boxers have right hooks, and this game's dangerous punch is its right analog stick. The way it's utilized surpasses any of the other EA Sports titles. You get a startlingly responsive feel for you boxer. You can even throw quick fake punches to fool your opponent. The game also does a good job of not letting the action devolve into a button masher. Balance, foot movement, and blocking are extremely important if you want to avoid becoming a human bobblehead. Lighting and shadows play well off of the boxers, and ambient details abound outside the ring. The career mode has its highlights, like training, but I wish there was more incentive for me to spend money like in Tiger Woods (although buying an entourage is sweet) or more to do from day to day. Still, Fight Night is more than good enough to make you see stars.

KATO - 8.75



THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE  
E  
ESRB

7.5

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## MTX: MOTOTRAX

THE BITE-SIZED BIKE

**D**eveloper Left Field is back in the motocross saddle after having made Excitebike 64. Meanwhile, Activision is trying to do what it has done to everything from skateboarding to wakeboarding – create an extreme sports dynasty. Motocross has yet to have that definitive game, and this release reaches for that title, but comes up just short.

MTX is basically broken up into three parts in its career mode: racing, trick-based Freestyle competitions, and a Freeworld where you pick up Tony Hawk-esque missions. Each part has its good and bad points, but I wish they were more unified into one big stew. For instance, in MTX, the Freeworld challenges (such as jumping among water barges) are cool, but these snippet-like interludes made me long for a larger, open-ended structure like THQ's MX Unleashed. Their bite-sized nature was in particular contrast to the great sense of speed I got flying and jumping through the racing portion. MTX is simply the fastest motocross game I've ever played. Overall, however, the career is well put together with its email and PDA hub, as well as opportunities to make cash through sponsorship.

It's not like this game doesn't try. You've got things like online play, a course builder, a wicked first-person cam, and an extensive (albeit sometimes fickle) trick system. With its many parts, however, the game doesn't convince me that it's assembled the crown. Yet. — **KATO**



■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR LAN, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** LEFT FIELD PRODUCTIONS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2

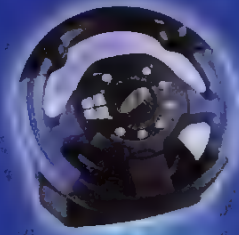
- **Concept:**  
Unify motocross' many parts into one career-encompassing shell
- **Graphics:**  
The draw distance for the detailed backgrounds is good
- **Sound:**  
I was pleasantly surprised that there is voice for the characters in the Freeworld
- **Playability:**  
The collision for trackside objects is great, making them moveable at slower speeds but certain death when you're trucking
- **Entertainment:**  
A good solid title that won't disappoint, but will leave you wanting more
- **Replay Value:**  
Moderately High

### SECOND OPINION

My experience with Mototrax was a very accurate simulation of what would happen if I actually tried to race motocross: I fell down a lot. Though I take most of the responsibility for my frequent faceplants, the game's controls are also partially to blame; the physics seemed accurate enough, but the system for performing and linking maneuvers was very hit and miss, leading to many restarted objectives. And those objectives themselves are nothing new. Beat this person in a race. Do these tricks in this order. Get points. The cycle repeats as you progress from one event to the next. The gameplay just doesn't vary enough to stay interesting in the long term. If you pick up Mototrax, you'll have fun with it in small doses (especially if you're a motocross fan), but it's the same breed of average fun that you can get from countless other titles.

JOE — 7.25

Maximize  
Your PlayStation®2



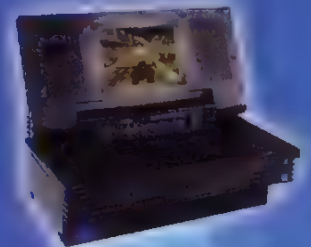
Racing Wheels



Sound Systems



Wireless Controllers



Gaming Screens

Maximum  
Gaming



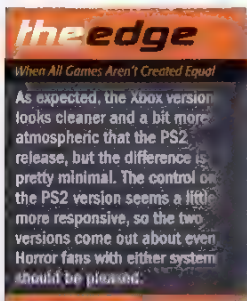
inteclink.com



**"If you think Peter Jackson's true masterpiece is *Dead Alive*, you'll be right at home with *The Suffering*."**



You'd think that all the hideous freaks would get along



As you can see, this is a charming, happy game

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | UNRATED ESRB

# THE SUFFERING

## DEAD MAN WALKING

The term "horror movie" actually covers a pretty broad spectrum of films. *The Exorcist*, for example, has very little in common with *Slumber Party Massacre*. With the release of *The Suffering*, it seems that horror games are starting to splinter into sub-genres as well. This title is not a survival horror game; it's a horror-themed action game, with gameplay more similar to *BloodRayne* than *Resident Evil*. And if titles like *Fatal Frame* represent the psychological end of horror gaming, then *The Suffering* is the equivalent of a splatter flick.

*The Suffering* is the story of Torque, a man on death row for killing his family. When the prison is overrun with hideous monsters, Torque must fight his way through the prison, an asylum, and various other locales on the haunted island of Carnate. At several points in the game, you'll have the choice to help or hurt other prisoners and guards, and your actions determine which of three endings you'll see.

No matter how you play, Torque is a man with a demon inside him. Literally. When your rage meter fills up, you can transform into a hulking beast for a short time and lay waste to your enemies. In human form, a variety of weapons are at your disposal as well. Melee combat is as simple as can be, but the large selection of guns and grenades keep things from getting stale. Puzzles are also well implemented and grounded in reality. Rather than arranging lawn gnomes

according to a mathematical algorithm to unlock the wind key, puzzles involve putting out fires and figuring out how to stop toxic gas from leaking into a room.

The number of enemies you encounter is rather limited, but they are nicely designed and the character models are one of the graphical high points of the game. As a whole, *The Suffering* looks pretty decent. The dark environments mask a lot of visual shortcomings like the blocky human models, and create a nicely gloomy mood. The great sound design adds a lot to the ambiance; this is game best played with a good speaker system.

While I have many positive things to say about this title, I cannot stress enough that this title is not for everyone. Like a *Friday the 13th* movie, I would hardly call this game scary; it lacks the claustrophobia and dread of a survival horror title. It is, however, filled with tons of gore, vulgarity, and offensive material. But it's nothing that hasn't appeared in countless shock films. Horror fans will certainly dig it; others may not. It's a bit too easy on the default difficulty level (health and ammo are never in short supply), and it can be beaten in roughly 12 hours, but there is enough ambiguity to the material that it's fun to play multiple times. If you think Peter Jackson's true masterpiece is *Dead Alive*, you'll be right at home with *The Suffering*. — JEREMY

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER MIDWAY ■ DEVELOPER SURREAL SOFTWARE ■ RELEASE MARCH 8



THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE 8.25

- **Concept:** As a death row inmate, you battle the tortured spirits that dwell in the haunted prison
- **Graphics:** Individual elements don't look that great, but the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts
- **Sound:** You'll hear voices telling you to do bad things. In the game, that is
- **Playability:** With only the occasional collision glitches, gameplay is pretty solid and workable
- **Entertainment:** Ask yourself if you like slasher flicks before playing this one.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

### SECOND OPINION

My whole review of this game comes back to one base statement: *The Suffering* is total crap. Midway's attempt at improving and/or updating the survival horror genre is more an exercise in nonsensical shock value without the quality gameplay or action to back it up. Sluggish camera controls, make-me-go-through-mazes level design, one of the worst weapons-management systems I've seen in the last few years, and a plot featuring characters so stereotypical and one-dimensional that they can most generally be described as merely offensive really round out *The Suffering's* package. In case you can't tell, there's nothing that I found interesting (outside of the sound design), innovative, compelling, or engaging about this game — action and survival horror fans would best serve themselves by leaving this on the shelves.

LISA — 5.25



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

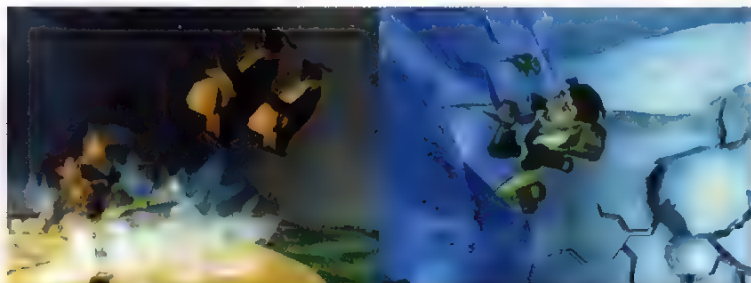
# PITFALL HARRY

WHEN HARRY MET SUCKY

It's not easy to make games. You can have a franchise with some name recognition. You can have good graphics. You can have a variety of gameplay and the state-of-the-art Havok physics engine. Heck, you might even have a few good ideas. However, none of these things are going to be worth a damn if you don't have A) a compelling character and storyline and B) finely tuned gameplay and well-designed levels. Unfortunately, Pitfall Harry fails on both those counts.

Pitfall Harry, while an important part of game history, is what scientists commonly refer to as a *dorkus malorkus*. Simply put, this title's characters, plot, and dialogue are hackneyed and verging on painful. Every joke falls flat, and every plot twist seems scraped from the bottom of Indiana Jones' barrel.

The gameplay attempts to do new things, but ultimately succeeds in being little more than frustrating. The "Total Control" dual-analog scheme is little more than a half-baked gimmick, although I did like the rafting and ice climbing sequences. As always, it is a lack of solid fundamentals that kills this title: poor camerawork, a frustrating map screen (yes, you heard that right), aggravating platforming, and mission goals that require tons of tedious backtracking. — **MATT**



Nothing puts fear into the hearts of gamers like angry penguins

After you acquire new tools, you must backtrack to explore previously inaccessible areas



Platforms like this swinging bridge use real Havok physics

Pitfall Harry decides to end it all

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** EDGE OF REALITY ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 17

## THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE  
**E**  
ESRB

**6**

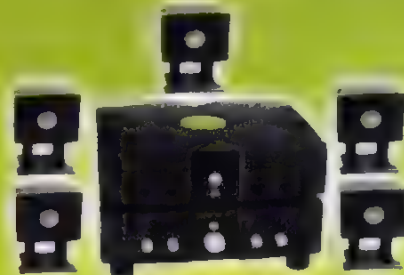
- **Concept:** Hey, some people might still remember Pitfall – let's make a new game!
- **Graphics:** Graphically, this title is competitive with most of what's on the market
- **Sound:** The voiceovers range from grating (Harry) to mildly offensive (the "ooga booga" gibberish of the "natives" is a little 1930s for my taste)
- **Playability:** The "Total Control" system isn't fully developed, and fails to cover up more serious playability issues
- **Entertainment:** Each time the game was finally getting up a head of steam, some ill-conceived sequence or flat-out annoyance killed the momentum
- **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

## SECOND OPINION

With a personality that can only be described as Brendan Fraser doing his best Keanu Reeves impersonation, Activision's iconic action hero of yesteryear has officially transformed into a loser for the new generation of gaming. Sticking with the series' roots, this new adventure guarantees that you'll swing on a vine, bounce on a croc, and sprint across a carnivorous hole every 10 seconds of play. Tack on trouble-laden vertical challenges, extensive backtracking, a plot that has as much suspense and intrigue as a Curious George book, and a character that makes Carrot Top seem cool, and you're looking at an experience that simulates an aneurysm. To be fair, I did like the varying controls for Harry's items like the Toobin'-style of movement for rafting. Sadly, the remainder of the game did absolutely nothing for me. As high and mighty as he was back in the day, Pitfall Harry is now an unrecognizable fish that won't go away.

REINER – 6

Maximize Your Xbox



Wireless Headsets



Gaming Screens

Maximum Gaming



inteclink.com

# REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005

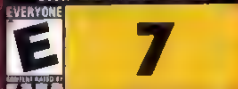
CLOSER TO THE GAME...YET FURTHER FROM THE COMPETITION

Over the last few years, I've become quite attached to the All-Star Baseball franchise. This series has always excelled in areas where other games haven't even attempted to go. With baseball card collecting, Expansion mode, legendary player interviews, and stadium tours, it has the enthusiast angle covered better than anyone. While it does a good job of luring in the baseball fanatic, its gameplay has aged poorly next to the competition.

On the field, All-Star hasn't been winning any Golden Gloves. In fact, it's always had a number of frustrating glitches like phantom catches. Going into this season, I hoped that Acclaim would work out the gameplay kinks and take the series to the next level. The implementation of the fielding cam, a view from behind the player's shoulder, brings you closer to the action and makes for some exciting moments, but does little to alleviate this game's annoyances (phantom catches, bugs, lackluster AI).

Getting with the times, Acclaim did implement online play, a host of new animations, and new player models. Long story short, Acclaim didn't go out of its way to elevate the series - this is simply an enhanced version of last year's game seen from a new perspective. - REINER

### THE BOTTOM LINE



**Concept:** Change the playing perspective, but leave everything else the same.

**Graphics:** The fielding animations are a bit rough, but the player models and stadium animations look great.

**Sound:** You can always rely on Thom Brennaman and Steve Eyre to call a good game.

**Playability:** The fielding cam brings about a level of realism, but the phantom catch, camera problems, and buggy AI nullify some of the game.

**Entertainment:** All-Star is the model of consistency, but this year it's too much of the same.

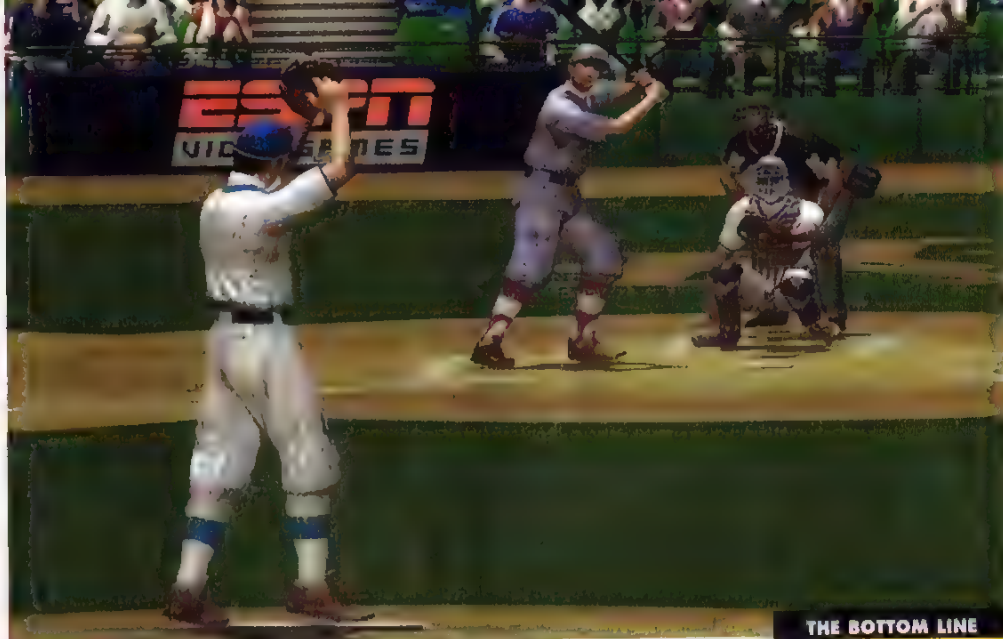
**Replay Value:** Moderately High

### SECOND OPINION

The new fielding cam is a check swing - it doesn't always give you a full view of the ball. Collision is still a problem, but new animations and some work around the edges makes ASB kinder and gentler to those more casual fans who think double-A refers to Harry Carey's drinking problem, and not the minor leagues.

KATO - 7.25

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND) OR XBOX LIVE) ■ **PUBLISHER** ACCLAIM ■ **DEVELOPER** ACCLAIM ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24 (XBOX) MARCH 2 (PS2)



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

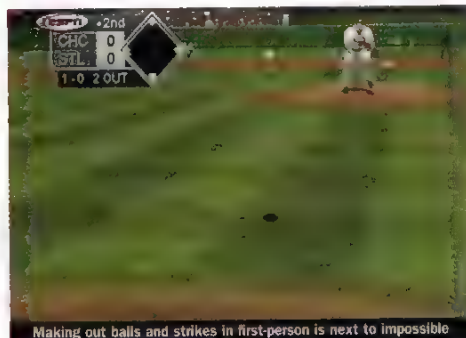
ANOTHER SWING & A MISS

The biggest attraction implemented into this year's game just happens to be its biggest failure. Zooming down into the eyes of a player, ESPN's first-person mode brings you closer to the pros than you've ever been before. For the first few seconds, the sensation of standing in the batter's box with Randy Johnson staring you down will have you tingling with anticipation. This feeling is killed, however, when the ball is hurled in your direction. Given the batting perspective, you don't get a good feeling for the strike zone or the cuts that you make. This is a typical example of the problems that plague this mode. Tracking down fly balls is a taxing process that often leaves the player questioning what to do. Should you sprint after the liner? Is it even hit in your direction? You never really feel comfortable in this view.

When it comes to the sheer basics of gameplay, ESPN still has a knack for fielding. Although the AI struggles with specific plays, the control that you have at your fingertips is a beautiful thing. The swiftness of player movement and smoothness of their animations are very true to the game and easy to manipulate. Blue Shift also went out of its way to alleviate some of the headaches that come with the game. To speed up play, you can interrupt your pitcher's idle animations and quickly go into your windup. When tracking down fly balls, once your player reaches the destination cursor, the game transitions to a catch sequence, thus reducing the risk of the ball bouncing over your head.

Sadly, the pitching and batting interfaces are not nearly as polished. The new Effort meter is a poor man's version of MVP's pressure sensitive pitching interface. It's easy to master and doesn't really hone in on a player's skill. When taking cuts, you really don't get the sensation that you've actually made contact with the ball, either. Part of this falls on the fact that the swinging animations are downright appalling.

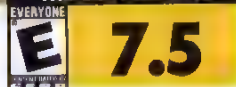
For the second year running, ESPN simply doesn't have it where it counts. I found myself more enthralled in simulating games. Without solid pitching and batting interfaces, you can't help but become disenchanting by this title's play. I applaud Blue Shift's decision to innovate, but the formula still needs a lot of work. - REINER



Making out balls and strikes in first-person is next to impossible

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 BROADBAND) ■ **PUBLISHER** ESPN VIDEOGAMES ■ **DEVELOPER** BLUE SHIFT ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 23

### THE BOTTOM LINE



**Concept:** A rebuilding year that shows signs of improvement, but ultimately comes up short

**Graphics:** The player models are not nearly as detailed as they are in MVP or All-Star. The stadiums look great, however

**Sound:** You won't find better crowd heckles

**Playability:** The pitching and batting interfaces still don't have a good feeling to them. Fielding remains great

**Entertainment:** Its simulation and online options are definitely in line with other games, but it's still a hard play to get into

**Replay Value:** Moderately High

### SECOND OPINION

ESPN Videogames (formerly Visual Concepts) has made a name for itself in football and basketball, but baseball will have to wait. Fittingly, this title is developed by outside studio Blue Shift, and the results aren't as good as the ESPN moniker it is under. It's like you get Ozzie Canseco instead of Jose. While the studio almost imitates the brilliance of football's first-person play, it's not as fluid and does not give enough cues (or accurate ones) to the player. Meanwhile, the career mode has grown, but shows none of the flair of the other top-flight ESPN games. Although the fielding is strong, the animations are often stiff and the AI arguable. Tellingly, the pitching mechanic, like the game itself, has its positives and negatives. I hope ESPN Videogames itself takes this franchise over next year to give it that extra push.

KATO - 7.5

### the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

At the last minute, Blue Shift cut the online leagues from the PlayStation 2 game. Therefore, both versions share the same content. This series started out as an Xbox exclusive, and it still feels the most at home on this system. The gameplay is a hair smoother, and the graphics - primarily the self-shadowing and player model details - simply smoke the PS2 version. Side by side, they really do look like two different games. Without a doubt, The Edge goes to the Xbox.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

# MVP BASEBALL 2004

EVERYTHING AND THE MINOR LEAGUES

**F**or the second year running, MVP is home to the best all around gameplay package. The pressure sensitive pitching mechanic, and sheer intensity of batting best exemplify the realism of the sport and skills that it takes to excel.

When a game is on the line and your pitcher begins to fatigue, each pitch that you throw is a nerve-racking experience that will likely have you chewing your nails right down to the lunula. If you are just a hair off with the timing of your button presses, you may serve up a meat pitch. Given the great velocity of fastballs, you really get a good feeling for off-speed and breaking pitches. It's the only baseball game that really delivers the mind game of batting. You often find yourself thinking that you'll get a fastball, but the pitcher comes in with a circle change that has you swinging a second too early.

The only area where the game comes up a little short is in fielding. The new Big Play Control certainly adds an element of excitement to the mix with the flashy dives and leaps that can be performed manually with the right analog stick, but the AI is still a little off. First basemen struggle with pitchers covering the bag. You may find yourself losing a shutout simply because the game highlighted the center fielder when you should have been controlling the left fielder. It plays better than other games, but it's still rough around the edges. I also found it aggravating that the announcers call home run shots well before the ball clears the wall.

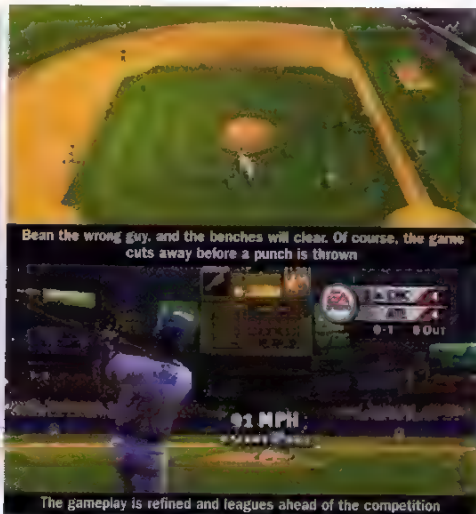
In the front office, MVP has improved greatly. Dynasty mode is now overflowing with enhancements. The daily email updates tell you everything you need to know, right down to who is on the trading block, strategies to use against different teams, and which players want more playing time. You'll also track your clubs AAA and AA teams, and can even play through every game in their respective seasons if you like. I'm always a sucker for unlockables, and MVP has a ton (retro jerseys, legendary players, stadiums).

Out of this year's baseball games, MVP is the complete package. — REINER

## The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Since online play can only be found in the PS2 version, you'd think that it would trump the other two. That's not necessarily the case, however. If you are more in the market for a single player game, the Xbox is the way to go. While the gameplay is identical in all three editions, you will notice a subtle framerate hiccup on the PS2 when transitioning between batting and fielding views. Season simulation in the Xbox version is much quicker as well. Seeing that this game absolutely devours memory card space, your standard GC 59 memory card won't cut it. Given the strengths of the two systems, The Edge is a wash between the PS2 and Xbox versions.



### THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE  
**E** 9.25  
ESRB

#### ■ Concept:

Tighten up the gameplay and redefine franchise play with the inclusion of minor league clubs

#### ■ Graphics:

The attention to detail is incredible. The slow-motion replays really show off the realism that EA has achieved

#### ■ Sound:

The announcers call homers as soon as they leave the bat, and rarely have anything interesting to say

#### ■ Playability:

Fielding still needs a little tweaking, but the batting and pitching games are nearing perfection

#### ■ Entertainment:

This is easily the best playing and most rewarding baseball game of the year

#### ■ Replay Value:

High

### SECOND OPINION

Believe it or not, baseball is fun again. No, there still isn't a salary cap and Bud Selig is ever the fool, but MVP has made playing the game more fun than picking daisies in the outfield. EA Sports' incorporation of right analog stick control makes all the difference here. Fielding is no longer a chore. Scale the wall; rob a Texas-leaguer with a sliding, diving catch in the shallow outfield; blow up the catcher at the plate. All are actions you now directly control, although your fielder's detection of the ball can be sticky. All in all, however, EA definitely has the hot stick. I also liked that my dynasty wasn't just words and numbers on a menu screen and that I was able to get a real feel for my double and triple-A talent by playing the minor league games myself. This is the kind of hands-on approach that'll make franchise junkies wet themselves, and is something that even EA's mighty Madden can't compare with.

KATO - 9

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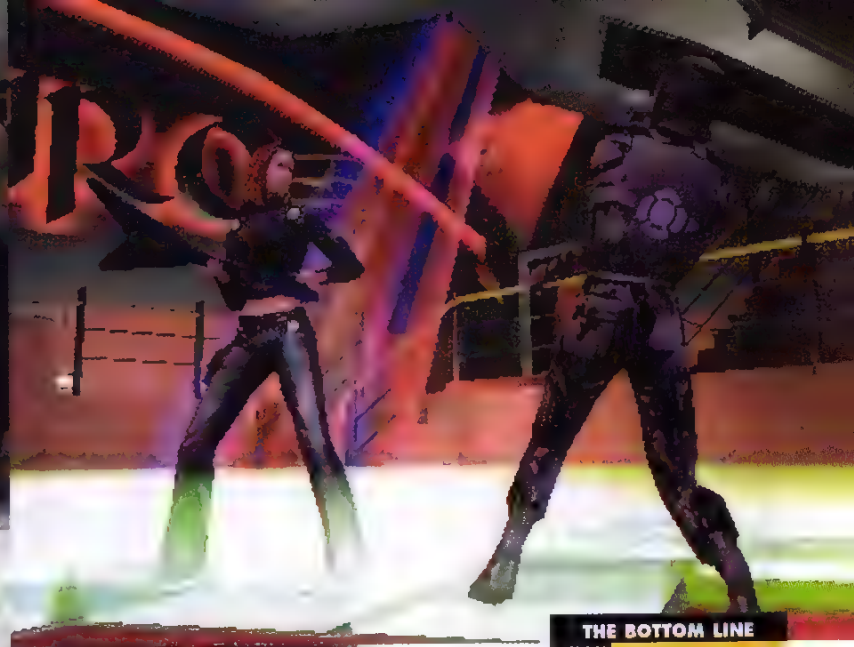
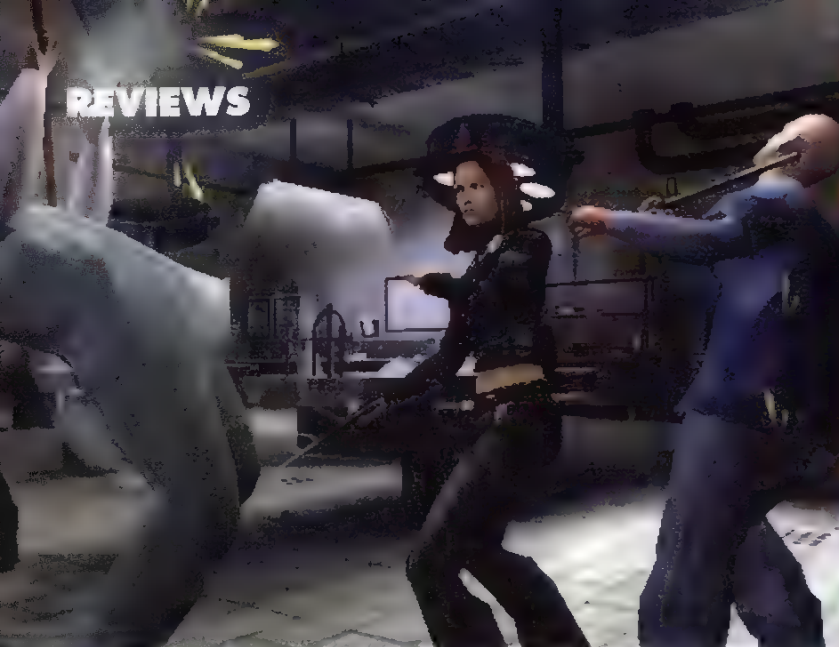
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■ STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) ■ PUBLISHER EA SPORTS  
■ DEVELOPER EA CANADA ■ RELEASE MARCH 9



"...it's a reasonably solid stealth/action title with nifty gadgets."

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# ALIAS

## MARSHALL IS THE BOMB

Playing as Sydney Bristow, gamers will need to negotiate a handful of exotic and dangerous locales in a series of events that tie into the end of *Alias*' second season. The game's plot is essentially like an unfiled episode of the show. Sydney is a real-life über-spy with a safety net of CIA operatives and the most endearingly dorky character in recent memory, Marshall, to supply gizmos to complete her missions.

Really, this game is very parallel to Atari's *Enter the Matrix*. It makes great use of its license by having the cast do all of the voice work, and the series' creator, JJ Abrams, penned its script. Those who are still in the dark about the alphabet channel's secret gem of a show will find, upon playing the game, that it's a reasonably solid stealth/action title with nifty gadgets.

The combat system lacks polish mostly in that it doesn't often require you to use all of the actions in your repertoire. For instance, I didn't really need to use my block until almost halfway through the game. This is unfortunate because the animations and the attacks performed are contextual – like Sydney on TV, the video game heroine isn't bigger or stronger than most of these goons; so she has to use tabletops, doors, brooms, and balconies to her advantage. Even though some of these attacks aren't

necessarily executed by the player (a Special Attack button generally decides what, specifically, Sydney will do), they make you feel smart. And, they look cool.

What's generally the biggest downfall of spy games, for myself at least, is the stealth AI. Thankfully, *Alias* doesn't really have any of the usual problems associated with sneaking around. I never wondered how someone saw me, and I also didn't get away with anything. Consistently solid, the enemy AI found me out when the should have, picked up weapons from fallen comrades, and generally behaved in a reasonable way – which is all good news.

Graphically, however, *Alias* falters. During actual play, characters and environments have noticeable jaggles. The cutscenes are unnervingly realistic, though. The characters get a serious upgrade in these sequences and the animations, coupled with some great texture maps, scarily recreate the cast and their mannerisms. Of course, some are better than others (why does Vaughn look like he's substantially heavier and markedly older than his TV counterpart?).

*Alias*, in essence, boils down to an age-old sentence in the gaming review business: Fans will mostly dig it and newbies won't be terribly disappointed. – LISA

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN T 7.5

- Concept:** Let players take control in an episode that ties into the end of season two
- Graphics:** Cutscene models are eerily close to their TV counterparts, but in-game graphics are jagged
- Sound:** Voice work by the cast is excellent and makes for one of the big highlights
- Playability:** Enemy AI is delightfully solid, but combat is a little less polished
- Entertainment:** *Alias* dorks will swoon, everyone else will think that it's an ultimate example of "okay"
- Replay Value:** Moderate

### SECOND OPINION

With a wonderfully enigmatic story that ties into the greater *Alias* universe, whimsical Marshall banter every few minutes, and beautifully illustrated cutscenes which feature voice work by the entire cast, there's more than enough here to make fans' mouths water. You'll even have the option to change Sydney's clothes like she so loves to do on the show. When it comes to gameplay, however, *Alias* is neither gripping nor finely tuned. The stealth component is generations behind the *Splinter Cells* of the world. Hand-to-hand combat is equally as forgettable. For some reason, the developer felt the need to show gamers exactly where to go and what to do with pre-level fly-by sequences. It's like a built-in strategy guide! Sydney worshipers will definitely get something out of it, but everyone else will likely feel like they were drugged and tortured.

REINER – 6.25

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ■ DEVELOPER ACCLAIM ■ RELEASE APRIL 6



Marshall really, really kicks ass

The thermal imaging view is handy in dark areas

Sydney and her fallen suitors

The split-screen function is really innovative, helpful, and fun



Stealth is solid and well-done



Sydney is just as good with weapons as she is with hand-to-hand action

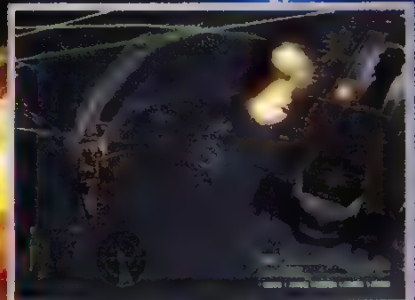




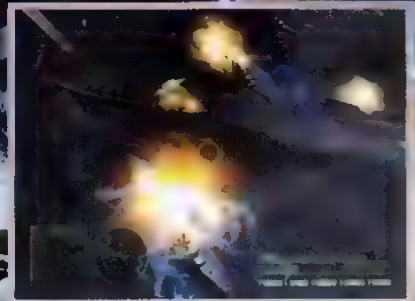
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PlayStation 2



## REVIEWS



PLAYSTATION 2

# MLB 2005

HOLY COW!

Over the last few years, 989 Sports has had trouble finding its groove with all of its sports brands. If this year's entry of MLB is a sign of things to come, 989 may give EA Sports a run for its money. I could hardly make it through a game last year without suffering a concussion from banging my head on my desk, but with this year's installment, I had trouble putting the controller down. While you can't help but grimace at some of the game's texturing and awkward batting stances, the gameplay package is as solid as can be. The fielding interface is especially praiseworthy, and in my opinion, this year's best. The pitching and batting systems lack the competitive edge of MVP, yet are authentic and respectable. MLB 2005 also does a tremendous job of harnessing the realism of the sport in its out-of-play cutscenes.

The gameplay is very well done, but this title's crowning achievement is found in the clubhouse. Uploading your likeness with the EyeToy, tinkering with every little stadium detail, and raising a rookie in Career mode—could it get any deeper? Even Madden's franchise material pales in comparison to what 989 has put together.

MVP still gets the nod for gameplay, but MLB is closing the gap. **REINER**

THE BOTTOM LINE  
EVERYONE  
**E** 8.5

- Concept:** Completely realistic gameplay, realistic strategy, deep franchise options, and more about the pennant.
- Graphics:** Fielding and pitching animations are right on the mark, but the batting stances are quite stiff and the overall level of texture in the game is not great.
- Sound:** The commentary team is very intelligent and on top of every action in the field.
- Playability:** The batting and pitching interfaces are not a lot better, but the fielding interface is the MVP.
- Entertainment:** The gameplay isn't quite as enjoyable as MVP, but it's still a lot of fun with standard features and the best franchise material in the sport.
- Replay Value:** High

### SECOND OPINION

This year's MLB gives gamers a nice combo: some improvements as well as alluring additions. Fielding is strong, although I thought the pitching was too unpredictable. I also think more stiff animations and bland graphics keep MLB from being top tier. On the other hand, the franchise options are the best in sports.

**KATO - 8**

**STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)  
**PUBLISHER** 989 SPORTS ■ **DEVELOPER** 989 SPORTS  
**RELEASE** MARCH 16



PLAYSTATION 2

# RAINBOW SIX 3

TRAITORS WILL BE SHOT ON SIGHT

Military operations rely on plenty of teamwork and precision execution. Rainbow Six 3 certainly bases itself on this fact, but what it tries to do and what it achieves can be two different things.

Sneaking around with your crew, your fates are always intertwined. The game lets you give some great orders to your soldiers, such as having them wait to act on your signal (called a Zulu go code). Unfortunately, your teammates' execution of these commands is uneven. Since you can only take a few bullets, and precision is often needed to survive, the experience can be a bit frustrating and repetitive. Your comrades' stupidity is only heightened when using a voice headset—a situation that led me to throw a little friendly fire towards my peeps (bring on the court martial). The AI for enemies also varied. One thing that was pretty solidly good, however, was the hit detection—something I cherish in a game this exacting.

Given the strength of the title's multiplayer, when deciding whether to go with the PS2 or Xbox version, I'd go to whichever console your friends are playing. Beyond that, this edition doesn't compare to the Xbox, visually or even for something as seemingly small as its save system. Yes, there are exclusives here (single and multi-player maps and offline multiplayer split-screen), but the shared maps are shorter—which can cut down the strategy of using your Zulu go codes. Rainbow Six 3 is a good time, but I feel like Ubisoft has been barking up this tree long enough to expect more. **- KATO**



**STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) ■ **PUBLISHER** UBI SOFT  
**DEVELOPER** UBISOFT SHANGHAI STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 23

THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE  
**M** 7

- Concept:** Tries to catch ground with the Xbox version of this tactical FPS series with a few exclusive features
- Graphics:** Attempts smoke, lighting, and shadow effects, but overall the game's average at best
- Sound:** The voices of your teammates can get annoying, especially when inconsistent
- Playability:** Giving voice-activated commands isn't always effective, and the d-pad ones can also cause trouble
- Entertainment:** The frustrating AI and repetitive single-player almost make this game better on multiplayer
- Replay Value:** Moderately High

### SECOND OPINION

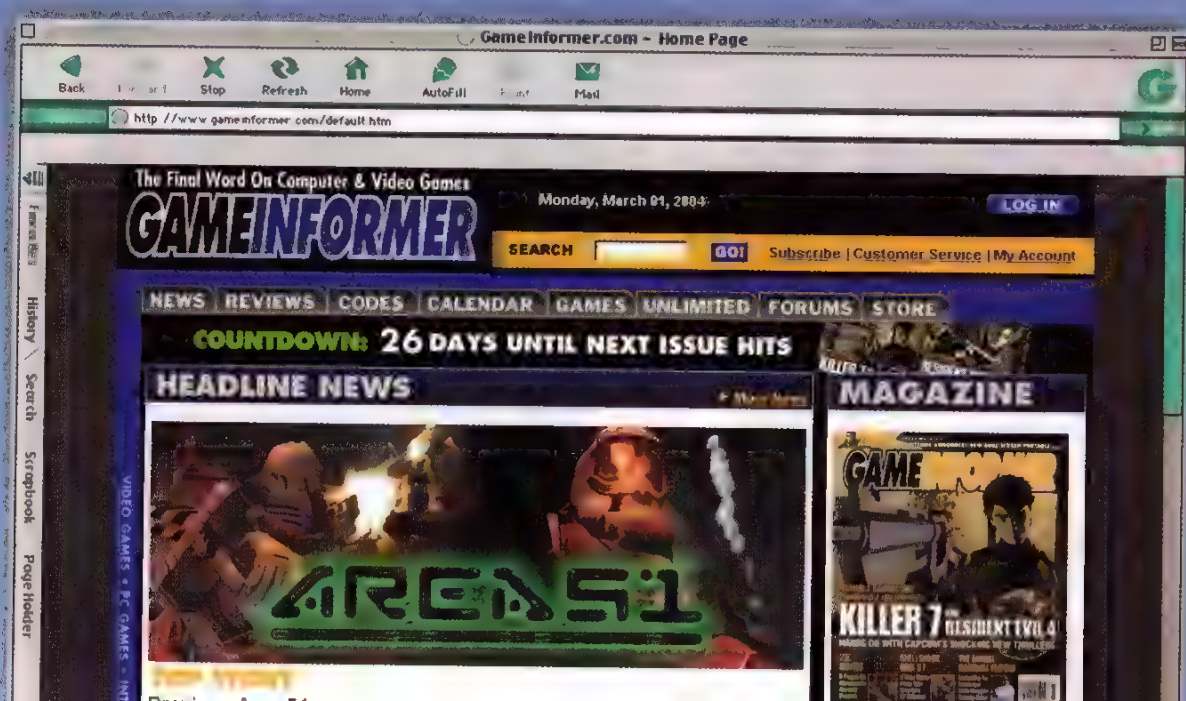
Wow, this is really an unholy bastard child of the vastly superior Xbox version. Not only have the graphics, framerate, and responsiveness taken a big hit, but the levels are merely a fraction of their original size. Teammate AI is even spottier, and worse overall, than it is on the 'box. Lighting is so inferior that many areas that were dimly or intermittently lit are now simply pitch black, forcing players to have nightvision or thermal vision on nearly all of the time. Gone are the three quicksaves per mission, replaced by arbitrary checkpoints. Load times are frequent and obscenely long. You get the idea—Rainbow Six 3 is a heck of a game on the more powerful Xbox, but was designed for that machine's greater capabilities. Even ignoring the comparisons to the Xbox version, this port falls to even come close to top PS2 titles like SOCOM.

**ADAM - 7**

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PLAYSTATION 2

# NAVAL OPS: COMMANDER

CONTEMPLATING YOUR NAVAL

**Y**ou know that guy who gets a few laughs with a lame joke, so he repeats it every five minutes, expectantly looking around the room for people who still find it funny? Naval Ops: Commander is that guy. Koei's 2003 release, Naval Ops: Warship Gunner, received some mild acclaim for its innovative ship customization system, so this sequel tries to offer the exact same thing, with no real improvements or additions. I went through a mission after boring mission, building up money and resources so I could finally build the "USS Jubilation," the most powerful warship to ever grace the seas. It had machine guns, missile arrays, and torpedoes. I couldn't wait to take it out and lay waste to my foes. Unfortunately, my impressive creation was forced to engage in mundane missions and unexciting encounters — it was like watching Superman pay bills or walk the dog. If you want to get the most out of this game, you should use it to make yourself an awesome battleship, then turn off the console and just imagine it tearing through fleets of worthy opponents. — **JOE**

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

**T** **6.25**

- **Concept:** Follow up a mildly successful game with more of the same.
- **Graphics:** The ships look fine if you zoom in on them, but you won't be able to see anything else if you do.
- **Sound:** A faceless voice incessantly announcing even the simplest of your executive commands.
- **Playability:** It's the menus, not the ships, which are difficult to navigate.
- **Entertainment:** Even with a custom fleet, this game is just no fun.
- **Replay Value:** Moderate.

**SECOND OPINION**

Many will appreciate the wonderfully deep ship customization in this sequel. Upgrading your flagship or designing a completely new one with researched parts is very cool. Unfortunately, these things are beside the point when the gameplay is the very definition of mediocre. Not bad enough to hate, but not good enough to keep playing.

**ADAM - 6**

■ **STYLE** T-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI ■ **DEVELOPER** MICRO CABIN ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 9



PLAYSTATION 2 UNLIMITED ENABLED

# CRIMSON SEA 2

LOST AT SEA

**Technology is obviously** a huge part of vids, but what if it's a detriment? Koei has been riding high on its ability to produce game engines that feature large numbers of units on screen, as showcased in Dynasty Warriors, but this newest title shows me that Koei's faith in its engine survives despite a need to surround it with more compelling gameplay.

Crimson Sea 2 does give you more than feral bloodlust. The story moves along at a good clip and contains a supporting cast to interact with in real time at the IAG HQ ship. The problem is that the mission structure is rigid and based on dungeon crawling through the same locations multiple times, which I believe grinds to a halt attempts to motivate you through the story. The combat itself can be fun, which is where Koei's ability to throw large numbers of enemies on the screen comes into play gloriously. The different levels to your Overdrive attacks allow you to do everything from juggle enemies in the air with gunfire (think Devil May Cry) to become impervious to enemy attacks, enabling a slowdown state in battle. Unfortunately, the game's camera system fouls up any fun. Crimson Sea 2 goes to great lengths (making you manage two camera buttons and a radar map) to disguise the fact that the developer screwed up by not simply offering a decent view of the action. The lock-on feature was even ineffective at times.

Despite the additions of multiplayer and a second playable character, this game and series haven't done enough to get Koei out of the rut that it has dug for itself. — **KATO**

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

**T** **7**

- **Concept:** The series jumps ship to the PS2 but remains at a relative standstill in the thrills department.
- **Graphics:** You'll be amazed by the CG movies and the lack of slowdown in gameplay.
- **Sound:** The orchestrated score is about the only standout here.
- **Playability:** Koei continues to be plagued by camera issues, no matter which game it is.
- **Entertainment:** I'm still waiting for this to make the significant leap away from its Dynasty Warriors core.
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High.

**SECOND OPINION**

Holding true to its Xbox predecessor, this sequel is all about mindless action. Whether you're slicing through a sea of enemies with your sword, combating a 10-story boss with firearms, or obliterating over 100 enemies in one fell swoop with a Neo-Plsionic power, you'll definitely get your dose of frenetic fragging. When you rack up a 250-hit combo, you can't help but grin devilishly. The branching missions and experience-based weapon leveling definitely add something to the mix as well. While I did enjoy working my way through this game, I also found myself incredibly annoyed by it. Not only are the level designs painful repetitive, you'll find yourself battling the same enemy types for hours on end. The lack of checkpoints in some of the longer missions also led to moments of curse-filled disgust. You really have to play this one in miniscule doses to truly appreciate it.

**REINER - 7.25**



The second playable character isn't too different

"I suggest you call your septic tank representative"

Collect extra scratch by bagging certain baddies

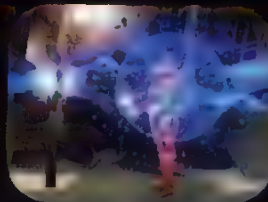
None of the camera systems totally work

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KOEI ■ **DEVELOPER** KOEI ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 30

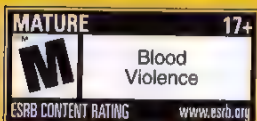
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# REVIEWS



GAMECUBE

## HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

NO HILTON IN THIS VALLEY

There isn't enough room to list the far-reaching improvements that this game features from its predecessors. Suffice it to say that, where the previous games felt like work, *A Wonderful Life* feels curious, satisfying. Earlier entries made many players want to explore wider areas, talk to different people, have other tasks to complete, raise new animals, and maybe even woo a lady friend. Each of these wants is now offered, but that's not to say that *A Wonderful Life* is the end-all of RPG/simulation titles. It's just that this entry will reach out to more players, who in turn, will find themselves comfortably at home.

Along with the standard feature list, there are some really nicely updated graphics and connectivity with the GBA title *Friends of Mineral Town*. You can go visit the town in the game, scrounge up the latest gossip, and generally just about anything. The biggest addition of this game is a little less tangible, though. Farming is less of a chore and managing your livestock is interesting. Customizing your herd and crossbreeding your vegetables is a perfect way to break what would be (and has been) otherwise tedious monotonous tasks. Not quite *Animal Crossing* caliber (I never felt that same draw to play), but well worth picking up. **LISA**

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

EVERYONE **E** 8

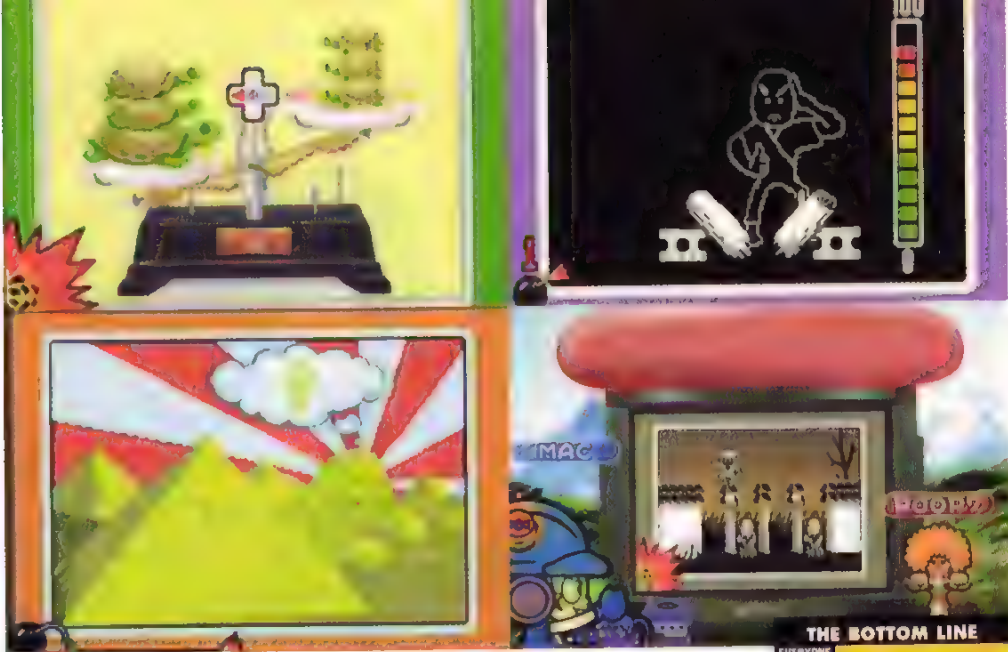
- **Concept:** *Harvest Moon* returns with a new twist.
- **Graphics:** Drastic improvements.
- **Sound:** Large improvement.
- **Playability:** Previous version's multiplayer.
- **Entertainment:** A drastic upgrade.
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High.

**SECOND OPINION**

I've always found the *Harvest Moon* titles to be incredibly laborious. It's a series about completing farming chores to better your relations with the village. Seeing that I won't even take out the trash in real life, do you really think that I'm going to water the tomatoes in a game? In this entry, Natsume has streamlined many tasks, making the experience less burdensome. The injection of variety, such as courting women, really breaks up the monotony of farming as well. This is easily the most polished entry yet. If you love this series, or are looking for an RPG with a different vibe, here it is in all its agronomic glory.

**REINER - 8**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME ■ **PUBLISHER** NATSUME ■ **DEVELOPER** NATSUME ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 16



GAMECUBE

## WARIOWARE, INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES

MORE OF THE STRANGE

**WarioWare was a** game that seemed instantly set for cult classic status. One of the most unique handheld titles in recent memory, the collection of short, simple, and strange minigames resembled an imaginary collaboration between Andy Warhol and an ADD-afflicted seven-year-old on a Red Bull jag.

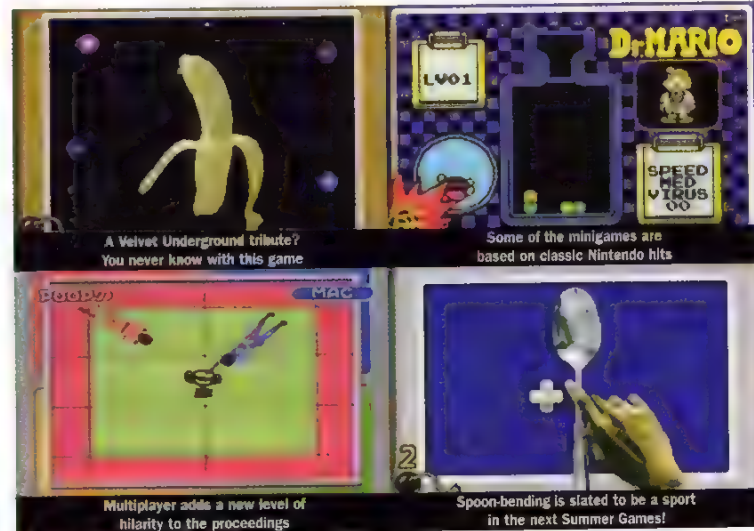
Now, Nintendo is bringing *WarioWare* to the GameCube, with mixed results. Right off the bat, fans of the GBA version will be disappointed that most of the simplistic minigames are repeated here with no real improvements or changes. Yes, there are a handful of new challenges, but I'd estimate that around 90 percent or more are reruns. Thus, the single-player mode won't offer much for those who have ventured in these waters before.

As such, multiplayer is where it's at. There are several amusing multiplayer modes, like *Listen to the Doctor* which forces players to compete while sticking out their tongue, sticking their pinkies out, or even forgoing use of their hands. In *Milky Way Delirium*, you compete for squares in a game styled like *Othello*. Another highlight was *Balloon Bang*, where you race to finish minigames before your opponents can blow up a balloon with a bicycle pump. While we had a great time playing multiplayer in the office, I'm not sure if this mode alone will justify a \$30 purchase for those who have already digested the largely identical GBA version. I think this game will be best suited to two groups: those who missed the GBA version, and hardcore *WarioWare* freaks. **- MATT**

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

EVERYONE **E** 7

- **Concept:** Minigames on meth!
- **Graphics:** The menus and presentation are different, but it's mostly identical to the GBA version.
- **Sound:** Oddly catchy MIDI-style ditties.
- **Playability:** Honestly, if you've mastered tying your shoes, you'll be a *WarioWare* master in no time.
- **Entertainment:** It's just as addictive as before, and multiplayer is amusing. I just wish there were more new games.
- **Replay Value:** Moderately High.



■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** APRIL 5

**SECOND OPINION**

*WarioWare's* hodge-podge of wacky minigames is one of those rare video game treats. Sure the graphics are ancient and the gameplay simple, but you just can't help but be charmed by its three-second helpings of video game goodness. It is a shame, however, that the GameCube features so many of the same games that were found on the GBA edition. Which isn't a bad thing if you haven't played the handheld edition, but for *WarioWare* veterans the lack of new minigames to master is disappointing. For me, this GameCube edition's biggest draw is the multiplayer element. Not as great I would have hoped, but sufficient. If you plan to play a lot of multiplayer, it's worth the 30 bucks. But if you are looking for a solo experience, check out the original on GBA. It's better on the go than on the couch.

**ANDY - 7**



GAMECUBE

# PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EPISODE III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION

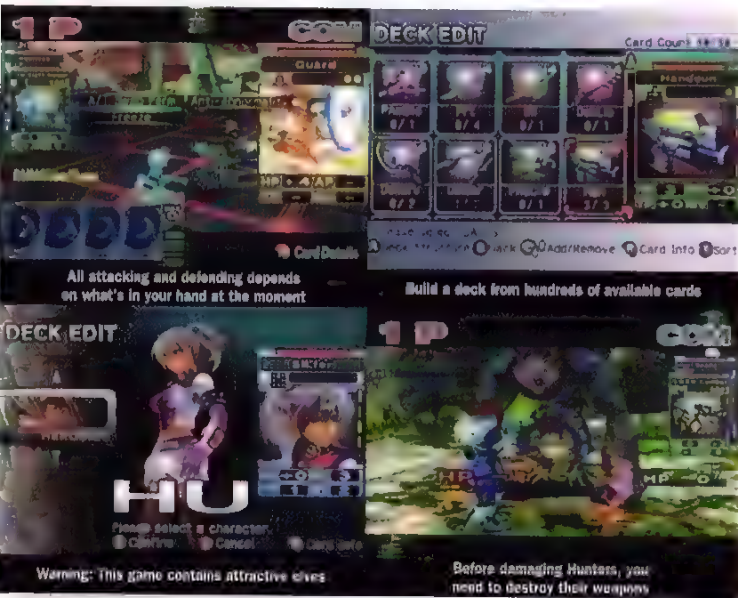
DISCARDING TRADITION

**W**hen I first sat down with PSO III, I was convinced it would provide nothing more than an average strategy/role-playing experience. Honestly, the graphics are marginal, the single-player storyline is disjointed, and the menu navigation is muddled. But, as the old maxim goes, beauty is on the inside.

This is not your typical PSO game. There is no dungeon crawling, no exploring between battles, and no real-time combat. Think of it more like Yu-Gi-Oh Online, but in a good way. You can choose to play as either the weapon-wielding Hunters or the creature-summoning Arkz, using cards to strategically gain the advantage on the battlefield.

Once the fight starts, the game begins to shine with an unexpected glow. Each turn is divided into three phases where you play your cards, move, and attack (in that order). This format might seem a bit rigid, but the emphasis placed on variety and personal style is surprising, and leaves the door open for countless card combinations and strategies; no two battles are quite the same.

Though the visual and audio aspects of PSO III leave something to be desired, the concept and level of variability at its core (not to mention that it's one of those elusive online-enabled GameCube titles) is enough to make it a highly enjoyable and surprisingly addictive game. — **JOE**



■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)  
■ **PUBLISHER** SEGA ■ **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2

THE BOTTOM LINE

TEEN  
**T**  
8

■ **Concept:**  
75 percent engrossing strategy game, 25 percent jumping on the card-related bandwagon

■ **Graphics:**  
A bit behind the times, but they get the job done. The character designs are particularly good

■ **Sound:**  
Don't expect anything beyond a generic "spacey" soundtrack and stock effects

■ **Playability:**  
Battle controls are simple and easy to learn, but menu navigation is clunky

■ **Entertainment:**  
As the name implies, you'll have more fun with this game online, but the single player mode is passable, too

■ **Replay Value:**  
High

SECOND OPINION

PSO III is more or less a deep and engaging strategy game wrapped in an ugly, counter-intuitive shell. Menus never seem to work the way you'd expect them to, the animations are terrible, and there's a bit too much crap to cut through in order to get to an actual battle. On the plus side, when you do get to a battle, it's a heck of a lot of fun. There are so many facets to the turn-based card combat that I'll bet that the developers don't even know what the "best" deck or strategy is. Along with the sheer number of cards available, and the differences in the warriors you can choose to represent you on the battlefield, the potential outcome of a match is based much more on your skill as a player than on luck or having the best cards. Let's just hope that the online play lures enough people into bringing their GameCubes onto the Net to make it worth the monthly fee.

ADAM -- 8

REVIEWS



GAMECUBE

# CUSTOM ROBO ROBO NO-NO

**W**hile it has been around for a while in Japan, this is the first Custom Robo game to make it to the States. I have a feeling it will also be the last, as it seems unlikely to find much of a fan base here. At a distance, it looks like an RPG, but it's really just a robot-themed Power Stone with some weak story elements in between battles.

As a Robo Commander, you battle other "bots in bland, isometric arenas with hopes of winning new parts. The variety of pieces you can obtain does make for a huge number of robot combinations, but combat never evolves past button mashing. Between rounds, you have to slog through pages and pages of dialogue and visit different locations to advance the story. The trouble is that there is no freedom of exploration. You must visit certain locations at certain times, and you must talk to specific individuals.

The locations and story elements do nothing other than fill time in between the short, simple matches. Multiplayer is available, but it needs to be unlocked in story mode, and battles can be completed in a minute or two. If anyone really needs a Pokémon-influenced robot title for their GameCube, the very similar MedaBots: Infinity was released a few months ago.

It's not great either, but easily better than this. — **JEREMY**

It's not great either, but easily better than this. — **JEREMY**

It's not great either, but easily better than this. — **JEREMY**

THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE  
**E**  
5.75

■ **Concept:**  
A kid-friendly robot fighting game wrapped in an ultra-thin RPG shell

■ **Graphics:**  
Not bad, just incredibly plain. The virtual reality-sim arena feature next to no detail

■ **Sound:**  
Entirely disposable — there's no spoken dialogue, and music and sound effects are generic

■ **Playability:**  
Although it tries to crank depth, you'll wind up just mashing B a lot

■ **Entertainment:**  
Aside from a few chuckles here and there, most will quickly tire of this basic, uninvolved release

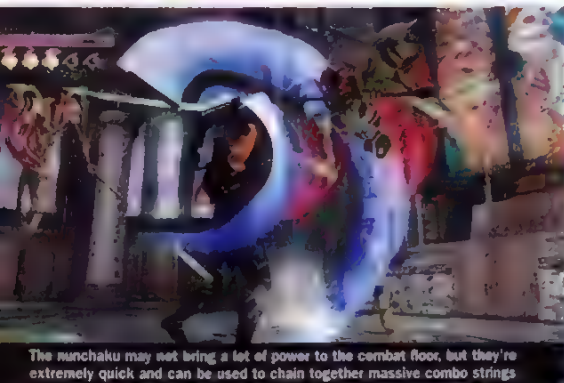
■ **Replay Value:**  
Low

SECOND OPINION

This game is held back by its refusal to further explore possible RPG aspects, as it holds strong to its fun multiplayer roots. I wish the arenas were a little bigger, but you'll dig the different parts for your robot and the writing is even funny. I'd love to take this baby for a spin online, but Nintendo's not that kind of girl.

KATO -- 7.5

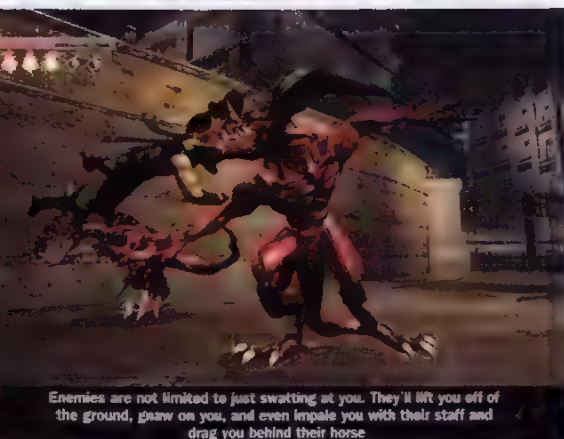
■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO  
■ **DEVELOPER** NOISE ■ **RELEASE** MAY 10



The nunchaku may not bring a lot of power to the combat floor, but they're extremely quick and can be used to chain together massive combo strings



Janet Jackson would be proud



Enemies are not limited to just swatting at you. They'll lift you off the ground, gnaw on you, and even impale you with their staff and drag you behind their horse

XBOX UNLIMITED ENABLED

# NINJA GAIDEN

## A NEW KIND OF GAMING ZEN

**A**t one point during gameplay, I found myself with my back against the wall as two ninjas approached, stalking me like wolves do their prey. Given the severity of the situation, I knew that I wouldn't last much more than a second if I faced them head on. In desperation, I leapt up onto the wall and scurried around the corner to a favorable vantage point over my attackers. With one swift strike, I came down upon my foes like the wrath of a god, decapitating both of them with one fell swoop. As their heads rolled and their bodies collapsed to the ground, I paused the game, took a moment to reflect, and said to myself, "It doesn't get much sweeter than this."

Not since the original *Devil May Cry* has a game made me feel like such a badass. I continually found myself in absolute awe over its visceral gameplay charge. By seeing just how taut the swordplay in this game can be, you have to assume that Tononobu Itagaki and his crew at Team Ninja went into this project with the hope of creating the most intense game to date.

Unlike most ninja titles, you won't find yourself tiptoeing behind enemies and ducking around corners. Along with a healthy dose of Indiana Jones-like puzzles, this game's primary focus is the action that it brings to your screen. Ryu Hayabusa's move set is equivalent to a character in a fighting game. With this bounty of attacks, you can unleash one combo after another, perform miraculous high-flying maneuvers, and absolutely cripple the opposition. Later in the game, you'll even find yourself sizing up the competition. Do you rely on the might of the trusty Dragon Sword, tap into the speed of the nunchaku or Vigoorian Flair, or try to apply an instant kill with the hammer?

Each weapon (and its upgrades) brings with it a different set of moves and strategies. When you begin the game, you have a standard set of attacks at your disposal. A few stages later, you'll find yourself with more moves than you know what to do with. You'll be bouncing off of enemies' heads, tossing them into walls, launching into the sky and spearing them, and even summoning the power of the gods to create a whirlwind of ice.

The controls that Team Ninja has fashioned are absolutely

perfect for the combat at hand. Never before have I felt so comfortable in an action game. As easy as it may be to handle, this is not a game for novices or people who are easily flustered. Without a doubt, this is one of the most difficult titles on the market. In all honesty, I wouldn't be surprised if people wrote in saying that they couldn't get past the first boss. It's the kind of game that tests you every step of the way. As wicked as some of the bosses may be, even the casual thug or ninja is capable of draining your life. There are no easy fights in this game. Sometimes you'll have to take the defensive and look for openings or counter your opponents' blows. Other instances have you facing off against a horde of undead. The beauty of the game is that there's a trick to taking down every enemy that you face. To make quick work of the undead, you simply need to lop off their heads. To slow mounted troops, a quick arrow to the foot will knock them off of their steed.

It's continually demanding of skill and flawless execution. If you use too many health potions in a fight, you could ruin your chances of moving forward in the game. You'll often find yourself questioning whether or not you should press forward, restart from a previous save point, or completely begin the game anew.

If you have the patience and mental determination to overcome this title's physically exhausting challenges and unforgiving difficulty, *Ninja Gaiden* will absolutely rock your world. Not only is it one of the most entertaining games to play, it's a marvel to look at. The game has visuals that absolutely kill. The detail that accompanies the environments, character models, and effects are truly spectacular. Furthermore, there is no greater payoff in defeating a bothersome boss than a beautiful CG movie.

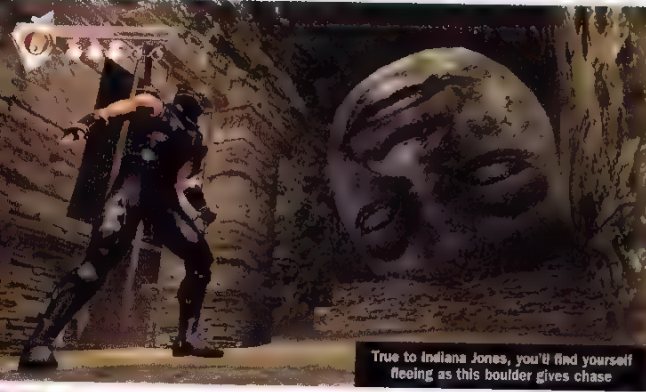
With 16 lengthy stages, Normal and Hard difficulties, and secrets buried around every corner, *Ninja Gaiden* is capable of keeping you hooked for the better part of the year. From start to finish, this game captivated me to no end and wowed me like few others have. If you're up for a good challenge, and are looking for the best that the Xbox has to offer, *Ninja Gaiden* is an absolute necessity. — REINER

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER TECMO ■ DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA ■ RELEASE MARCH 2



# GAME OF THE MONTH NINJA GAIDEN

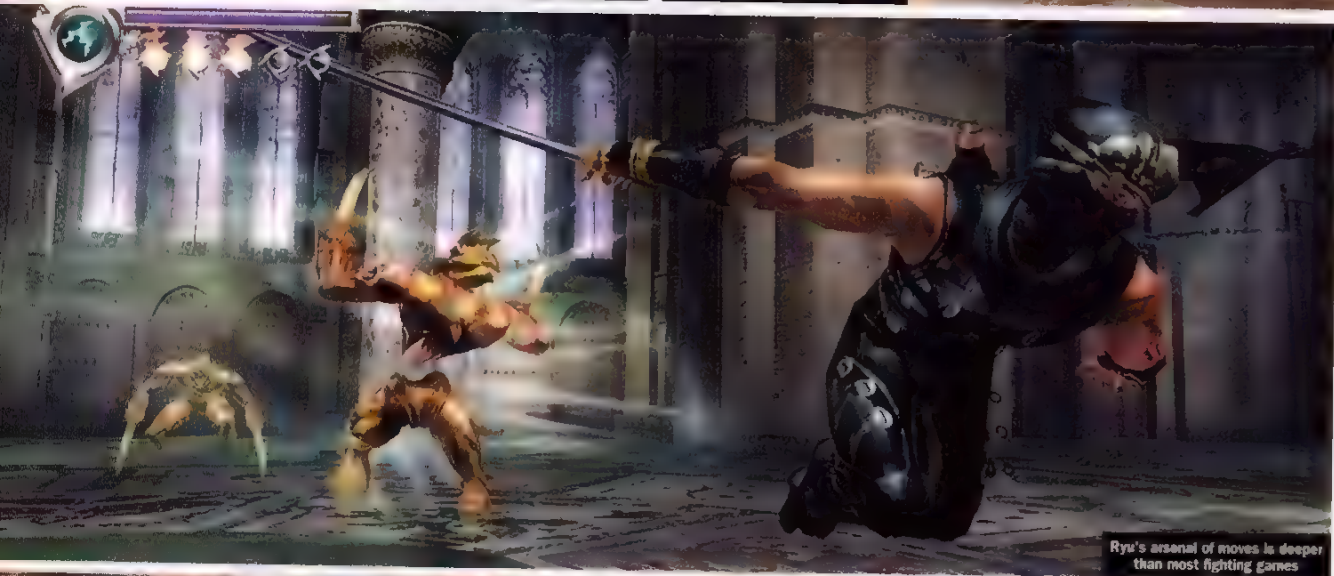
"Not since the original Devil May Cry has a game made me feel like such a badass."



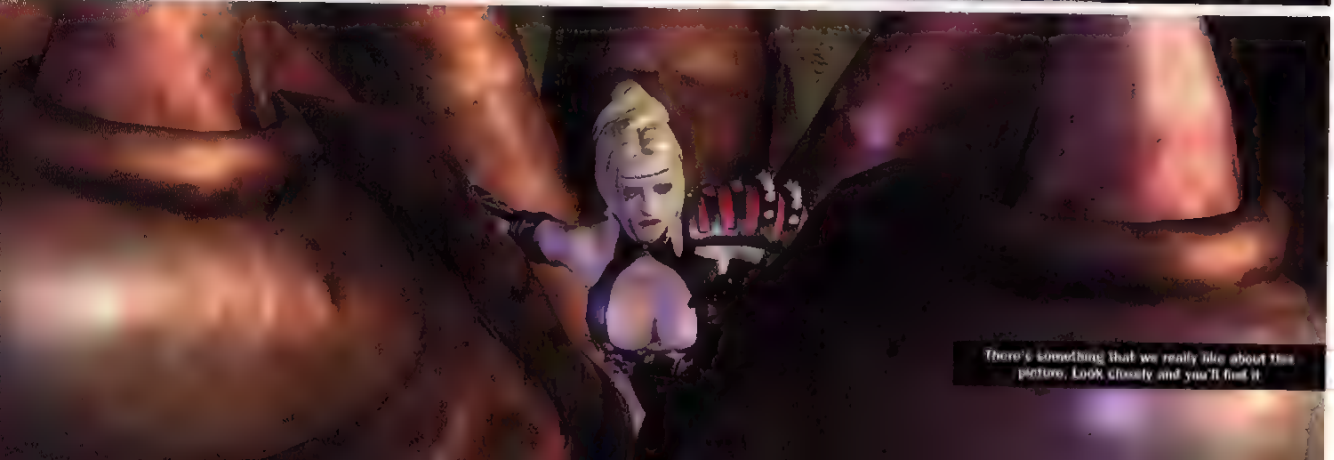
True to Indiana Jones, you'll find yourself fleeing as this boulder gives chase



You just gotta love the detail that went into the bosses



Ryu's arsenal of moves is deeper than most fighting games



There's something that we really like about this picture. Look closely and you'll find it

## THE BOTTOM LINE

MATURE  
**M**  
ESRB

**9.5**

- **Concept:** Frenzied ninja action with some of the toughest fights in all of gaming
- **Graphics:** Incredibly gorgeous. The smoothness of Ryu's animations, detail that went into the enemies, and clarity of texturing will leave you breathless
- **Sound:** A blend of rock and techno that really gets your blood pumping. Spoken dialogue accompanies every cutscene
- **Playability:** The controls are exquisitely crafted, and the number of moves that you have at your fingertips is truly impressive
- **Entertainment:** A great game and a strenuous workout in all one. Action doesn't get much better than this
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

## SECOND OPINION

After all the delays, and all the hype, I am quite pleased to report that Ninja Gaiden was completely worth the wait. Not only is it graphically gorgeous, its playcontrol is white-hot. I'd easily put it right up with Viewtiful Joe as the two best action games of this generation - Ninja Gaiden plays that well. That said, this game is not for the faint of heart. From beginning to end, every enemy can and will kick your ass if given the opportunity. If you don't have a thank-you-may-I-have-another-sir attitude, its 16 levels of relentless combat will leave you weeping like a little schoolgirl. But if you have the skills, Ninja Gaiden is easily one of Xbox's best titles and an absolute must-play.

**ANDY - 9.5**



THE BOTTOM LINE



7.5

“...a debut that hints at greater things to come.”

XBOX

# BREAKDOWN

## WANT A KNUCKLE SANDWICH?

**B**reakdown has a pretty big reputation to live up to. After a premier spot in Microsoft's Xbox presentation at last year's E3 and some lofty claims along the way, Namco is bracing to have a hit. A lot of the hype is due to the fact that the company has seemingly gotten two key ingredients in its corner – eye-catching graphics and a gameplay hook through the title's first-person melee combat. Instead of kicking down the door and loudly announcing itself as a new Xbox super-power to conquer all others, however, Breakdown instead achieves a smaller success by giving gamers a debut that hints at greater things to come.

The first-person perspective in Breakdown is neither a gimmick nor simply pedestrian. Namco has supplied subtle little touches that help immerse you into the role of Derrick Cole, besides just seeing his arm reach out and smack someone. The title never pulls you out into a separate loading or menu screen, and thus there aren't any “levels” per se. Instead, it flows as one complete story thanks to its in-game loads. Whether it's the vision distortion after getting punched or your heavy breathing after a run, Breakdown does a good job of not feeling faceless or impersonal.

One of the game's big draws, first-person melee combat, can be uneven. Booting someone across the room is more

than gratifying (as is getting thwacked yourself), and I was glad to see that the title's immersion aspect was didn't fail during combat. For example, the collision between Derrick's swinging arm and an enemy's face is exact enough that you begin to understand just how far his reach is and who you can and cannot hit depending on how far away you are. The lock-on system works – even though you can flip and somersault enough to make yourself dizzy – but multiple enemies present a problem. Gunplay is also mostly enjoyable. I like that conserving ammo is the name of the game, but found that hit detection was a crap shoot – especially when you're behind cover.

Breakdown isn't an all-out action title, however. You'll experience hallucinations, see other cool scripted events, and occasionally interact with the environment for things like pop can power-ups. These gameplay elements, however, aren't strong or consistent enough (particularly in the middle of the title), making Breakdown feel like Deus Ex-lite rather than the fully-formed, totally immersive video game world the developers wanted. The title remains an engaging experience and the start of a series to watch in the future. – KATO

- **Concept:** Namco attempts to deliver an immersive first-person, Deus Ex-like adventure
- **Graphics:** Breakdown has its moments, but is far from a masterpiece due to its jaggies (even in hidef) and predominately bland environments
- **Sound:** Snatches of ambient dialog from NPCs (and some swearing) is all that'll catch your attention
- **Playability:** The first-person fisticuffs are flawed, but executed reasonably well
- **Entertainment:** Breakdown is a solidly fun time that comes up just short in a few key departments
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

### SECOND OPINION

I want to root for Breakdown; I really do. It's a defiantly strange, and distinctly Japanese, take on the first-person genre. Notice I said “genre,” not “shooter.” While you do engage in some occasional gunplay in the course of this bizarre ride, Breakdown places its focus on first-person hand-to-hand combat. This might sound strange, but after you become acclimated, it proves to be a fairly engaging system. As much as I enjoyed this novel approach and the surreal imagery, Breakdown fails to live up to the promise of its premise due to some excruciatingly repetitive level designs. You'll spend at least 60 percent of your time opening doors and pressing buttons in bland industrial hallways. It's a shame, because Breakdown ranks up there with the Dreamcast's Maken X as one of the more unique first-person games I've ever played.

MATT – 7.5

■ STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ PUBLISHER NAMCO ■ DEVELOPER NAMCO ■ RELEASE MARCH 16



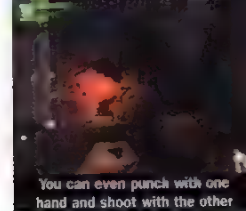
Flying scale. Yummy



Hallucinations will keep you on edge



I needed another quarter



You can even punch with one hand and shoot with the other



Blood graffiti – all the kids are doing it



Looking for a fist to put your face in



THE BOTTOM LINE



8

XBOX

# UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

PORTS CAN BE DONE WELL

**Y**es, this title is more or less a straight port of last year's PC title of the same name. No, that doesn't mean it's bad. Unreal II offers a lot in terms of variety – weapons, enemies, and environments all change significantly from level to level, and keep the gameplay from getting stale.

While the story of the single-player mode isn't the most enthralling tale I've ever played through, it's certainly passable for an action title. Especially in the last few levels; things really take off, and satisfyingly cap off the approximately 10-12 hours of time you put into finishing off the campaign. Of course, the multiplayer – whether co-op story mode or online competitive play – can rather enjoyably extend your time with this game far beyond that.

The biggest issue I have with this title is that the weapon switching is pretty awful. Many times, I found myself making do with whatever I happened to have out, rather than suffer through trying to find the right tool for the job at hand. Other than that small complaint, every facet of Unreal II is very solid.

Unreal II won't stop anyone from caring about Halo 2, but it should keep the edges off the raw impatience burning in many Xbox gamers' gullets for a while. And who knows – maybe you won't even want to give this up when the next generation of shooters arrives. – **ADAM**



Stop, drop, and roll

Explosion effects are excellent

Jumping puzzles. My favorite

This is one of the coolest levels ever

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)  
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **DEVELOPER** LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10

■ **Concept:**  
 Give Xbox owners the chance to play Unreal II, along with the recent XMP add-on

■ **Graphics:**  
 Not the best on the 'box, but the stable framerate is nice

■ **Sound:**  
 Barring the often-wretched voice acting, it's very good and adds a lot to the experience

■ **Playability:**  
 One of the easier console FPSs to aim in. Weapon switching bites, though

■ **Entertainment:**  
 If you prefer your shooting to take place in the future, this is a great way to do it

■ **Replay Value:**  
 Moderately High

## SECOND OPINION

I give this title points for trying to do something different with multiplayer. The XMP mode is a lot more than just a standard deathmatch and many players will dig the teamwork-oriented gameplay. For Xbox Live users, Unreal II offers a nice alternative to the familiar online experience. However, it doesn't have as much to offer those without Live. Compared to other Xbox FPS titles, Unreal II looks pretty dang poor. It's not a flat-out ugly game, but it's also not in the same league as the super-pretty titles Xbox is known for. The story is fairly pedestrian, and there are tons of long loading screens to sit through. If you are a shooter junkie, then it's probably worth picking up cheap, but all others can wait for the upcoming triple-A titles, rather than this B-grade adventure.

**JEREMY - 7.5**

REVIEWS



XBOX

# TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

MORE SCRAPS FROM THE PS2 TABLE

**I**t's been a year since Wrath of Heaven was released on PS2, and

now Xbox owners finally get a port. It's being touted as a remake with better graphics and AI and such, but in reality, this is simply a port.

Yes, this version has fewer jaggies than the original and the guards block more, but they're still dumb as rice cakes and forget about you seconds after leaving their sight. In all honesty, there is not a single thing about this version that stands out as superior to Wrath of Heaven.

If this title were an original property and not a remake, I would still have problems with it. In this day and age,

"stealth" should mean more than just waiting for a guard to turn his back before

walking up behind him. The stealth kills are quite cool, but the combat system is pretty shallow. I don't feel like a mighty ninja when I can get punked out by just

an average guard. Of course, combat wouldn't be as bad if the camera weren't so weak.

Most of the times I died were because I couldn't see the enemy I was fighting.

Although I was pretty disappointed with this title, it wasn't a total loss. The co-op missions are pretty fun, as is the versus mode. However,

Xbox has both better stealth games and ninja titles to offer, and there's no reason to pick this up if you've played the PS2 version. – **JEREMY**

**JEREMY - 7.5**

THE BOTTOM LINE



7.25

■ **Concept:**  
 Port Wrath of Heaven from the PS2, tweak a couple of things, and forget the quality.

■ **Graphics:**  
 Although supposedly improved for the Xbox, this looks almost exactly like the PS2 version.

■ **Sound:**  
 You remember what I just said about the graphics? Yeah, same deal.

■ **Playability:**  
 Compared to the original Return from Darkness, it actually feels a bit sluggish.

■ **Entertainment:**  
 Meh. Tenchu has some fun moments, but is certainly nothing exceptional.

■ **Replay Value:**  
 Moderately Low

## SECOND OPINION

Return from Darkness is the game equivalent of that guy you know who's still talking about *The Bachelorette* – unaware that advances have been made, that the world has moved on. I shed a tear for the things that this port could have done had it actually been reworked. Ninja games should make me feel awesome, not sad.

**JOE - 7.25**

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)  
 ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** K2  
 ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 8

# REVIEWS

XBOX

## AUTO MODELISTA

■ **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING  
 ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM  
 ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 21



2 To paraphrase Wooderson, Matt McConaughey's character from *Dazed and Confused*, "Racing games keep getting better; Auto Modellista just stays the same." It didn't

exactly knock my socks off back when it was released on the PS2, and this Xbox version doesn't really do much to convince me that this is anything more than a heat-looking, average-playing driving title. I shouldn't say that everything is the same, as Capcom has added Xbox Live support, which I applaud while at the same time wondering if anyone is going to care. On the downside, what was once my favorite part of the game – the elaborate cosmetic car tweaking – doesn't seem nearly as impressive after playing *Need for Speed: Underground*. — **MATT**

**E 7.5**

XBOX

## STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION  
 ■ **PUBLISHER** TDK  
 ■ **RELEASE** JANUARY 13



This title is notable only in the fact that every single facet of the game is mediocre to bad. Control, graphics, sound; all are very unimpressive. The worst part, however, is the level

design – about 80 percent of the stages involve protecting the Excelsior from some other capital ships. It's simply tedious to pound one Enterprise clone after another into bits, while hoping the shields of the ship you're protecting hold. I'd stay well away from this unless you own a pair of plastic pointy ears (and not the cool Liv Tyler kind). — **ADAM**

**E 5.5**

XBOX

## DEAD MAN'S HAND

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI  
 ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 7



Like the spaghetti westerns it emulates, *Dead Man's Hand* isn't exactly a "good" game, but it is pretty entertaining nonetheless. There are way too many technical problems to list, but it makes up

for them with a cool theme, fun environmental interactions, a decent story, and gameplay that's, well, fun. In other words, the meat of this game isn't that great, but the gravy covers that up pretty well. As Xbox FPS titles go, it's well below par, but anyone who enjoys a good western will get a kick out of this title. So what if it's not as slick as other shooters? You get to ride a horse and shoot up a brothel, and that's enough for me. — **JEREMY**

**M 7.75**



**THE BOTTOM LINE**  
**EVERYONE**  
**E 8.5**

XBOX

# COLIN MCRAE RALLY 4

I LIKE MY SCOTS CHEAP AND DIRTY

**N**ot long ago Codemasters gave us *Colin McRae Rally 3*. A year later and not much has changed. *Colin 4* boasts a career mode and online, but these aren't as fully formed as you'd want (online only lets you post times). Despite the small progress, this game's \$20 price tag and its fantastic racing can't be ignored.

*Colin's* stages will have a strange effect on you. You'll find yourself going from being a timid mouse to a roaring lion. Sharp turns on dirt roads with ditches of certain death on either side (and no margin for error) will no longer scare you, but only dare you to blow through them at top speed. Whether the criteria is length, diversity, excitement, or challenge, I know no better courses than those in this game.

New to this year is the fact that you can test parts at intervals between races. Testing shocks, for example, means you have to attack a course filled with jumps in order to put as much strain on the part as possible. Fun. Unfortunately, this is the extent of the new career mode. There are 2-wheel drive and fast Group B cars you can race, but I was hoping that this segment of the game was deeper. Furthermore, I thought the camera was too tight on the car, which has a tendency to hem in your experience a little. However, the game does give a wonderful sense of speed and a fine sense of handling over all of its different surfaces. I'd like to see a larger leap in the feature set next time, but for \$20, I don't see how you could go wrong with this one. — **KATO**

- **Concept:** This game gets a shade deeper and cheaper
- **Graphics:** Things look to be on the same high level as the third installment
- **Sound:** The Scottish burr of my co-pilot is better music to my ears than most games' soundtracks
- **Playability:** *Colin McRae's* analog trigger gas pedal creates an amazing depiction of realism, given all the different surfaces thrown your way
- **Entertainment:** While saying it has online and a career mode is a little misleading, racing fans of all stripes should buy this in a heartbeat
- **Replay Value:** Moderate

## SECOND OPINION

What's the best feature of this game? I'll tell you right now, it's probably the handy \$19.99 price tag – but don't think that this is a B-class entry in the *Colin McRae* series. Instead, this is the best rally game available and features stunning visuals, rock-solid physics that show admirable differences in terrain traction, nifty challenges to earn new parts, and courses that will make even the most experienced racer squirm. The classic cars, 2WD races (with offer nicely subtle physics changes in regard to traction and back-end swing), and illegal rides are nice touches, but I could stand for the career modes to be a little more in-depth. Honestly, although there is room for improvement, this entry doesn't need it in the gameplay department – only in expanding on the replay value of the title.

**LISA – 8.75**



■ **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 2

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"...a decent update to one of the best titles of yesterday."

**PC**  
**COUNTER-STRIKE:  
 CONDITION ZERO**  
 CAN YOU DEFEAT THE MACHINES?



**MATURE**  
**7.75**

The development of Condition Zero is a long and involved story. Now that it's finally out, it's easy to see why – the initial effort by Ritual (which is included on the CD) is pretty substandard. Fortunately, Valve passed the ball to Turtle Rock Studios, who did a much better job in not only crafting a single player experience, but adding to the online chaos as well.

Offline mode in Condition Zero is little more than survival training for the insanity that is multiplayer. Sure it's fun, and you can unlock better bots for your team, but it's still pretty bare of features. Players go through each of the maps and have to satisfy bizarre conditions like "Kill seven enemies with the M4" or "Win a round in under 45 seconds" to advance. These challenges, unfortunately, often come off as a very artificial way to make players use the different weapons – there's little reason to choose a sniper rifle on a small, twisty level.

Other than the offline campaign and some new maps (and tweaks to existing ones), there's not a whole lot new in Condition Zero other than the official bot. On the plus side, the AI of the official bot is awesome. They've got the same limited senses as a human player, and similar difficulty in

tracking moving targets. They'll call out locations of spotted enemies, clear or defend bomb sites, and camp just like everyone's favorite 13-year-olds. Playing single-player matches against them feels much like an online game, but without the lag or desync. Or, for that matter, the personality conflicts that inevitably come up on public servers.

Taking CZ online is very, very similar to regular old Counter-Strike 1.6. The main difference is in the fact that the official bot can be used to fill up the free slots on a server. Yes, you could have bots playing in 1.6, but using the new AI is such a huge improvement that there's really no comparison. It seriously almost feels like you're playing with real people. Not quite, but almost.

For those who love Counter-Strike, but have been turned off of online play because of whatever reason, Condition Zero will be a great boon. The problem is that neither the physics nor the graphics have aged particularly well; if you're looking for a next-gen FPS, this is not it. It is, however, a decent update to one of the best titles of yesterday. If you don't need cutting-edge visuals or Havok physics, and are looking for a good, fast-paced, strategic FPS, CZ will probably be a worthy investment of your \$40. – ADAM

**Concept:**  
 Give Counter-Strike players a good bot to fill up their servers with. Oh, and a single player mode, too

**Graphics:**  
 Better than the original CS, but not by much

**Sound:**  
 The bots actually say things that make sense, like calling for backup or saying where they spotted enemies! Huzzah!

**Playability:**  
 Same as always. And, as always, I find myself wishing for a grenade button

**Entertainment:**  
 There's a reason people still play CS five years after its release

**Replay Value:**  
 High



"You ladies looking for a little escort?"

Actually being behind the boxes would probably provide better cover

Grenades are the only acceptable way to clear a room

"Yeah, you go first. We'll...uh...watch your back."

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) ■ **PUBLISHER** SIERRA/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** VALVE/TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 15



"Watch your fire! I want a candy bar!"



Why you'd wear white camo in a jungle temple, I have no idea

**SECOND OPINION**

It's good to know that if I ever plan on going into counter-terrorism, I'll only have to worry about two things: bombs and hostages. At least, that's the impression I get from Condition Zero. Whether single or multiplayer, each mission is focused on either stopping terrorists from blowing up seemingly useless installations, or rescuing hostages who lack even the most basic survival instincts. Even though it isn't the most varied gameplay, the strength of this title lies in the team-based combat. Your AI controlled comrades are surprisingly aware, and give you the sense that you are really working together to complete your goals. The biggest problem is that the engine is starting to show its age graphically, and even with the extras, this brand-new game already feels a few years old.

**JOE - 7**



PC

# SYBERIA II

MORE OF A GRAPHIC NOVEL THAN A GAME

**B**enoit Sokal, creator of the Syberia games, is a master storyteller and artist – just ask the organizations that have bestowed upon him his numerous accolades. The difficulty with Syberia II is that these qualities have nothing to do with good gameplay.

The statement that this title has incredible graphics and art design doesn't really do it justice. Seriously – everything about the visual presentation is nigh-perfect. The masterful use of perspective and dramatic camera angles, combined with the intricacy of detail found everywhere, make the world of Syberia a vivid, fantastic place. The various settings bring to life a complete fictional Earth, one with a very distinct feel to it. In addition, Kate Walker's story is a compelling one, filled with interesting characters and a plot that lives up to the graphical splendor of the title.

Syberia II, however, has one flaw that almost eradicates all of the enjoyment generated by these elements. That blemish is the absolutely horrendous puzzle design. I use the term puzzles loosely here – the bland formula of "talk to this person, get item, use item on piece of environment" makes it a mind-numbingly frustrating chore to advance to the next awe-inspiring work of Sokal's genius. Using a walkthrough and simply enjoying the art and story of Syberia II would be a much better option than actually bothering to slog through the wretched puzzles. – **ADAM**



Every single place you go is unique in style and loaded with detail

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE ■ **PUBLISHER** MICROIDS ■ **DEVELOPER** MICROIDS  
 ■ **RELEASE** MARCH 22

THE BOTTOM LINE

**T** 6.75

- **Concept:**  
Finish the tale of the quest to find the last surviving woolly mammoths
- **Graphics:**  
The only word is incredible. Benoit Sokal is an artistic powerhouse
- **Sound:**  
Good atmospheric music, but there are long periods of silence in between
- **Playability:**  
Having to scroll the view to advance occasionally feels cheap and doesn't add anything
- **Entertainment:**  
If you handle the asinine puzzles, the visuals are a very nice treat
- **Replay Value:**  
Low

## SECOND OPINION

This second entry in the Syberia series carries on the story and visual themes from the first – namely interestingly designed tin-can robots and staggeringly beautiful backdrops. Unfortunately, it also brings back all of the things that I disliked about the first. I think that games like Syberia II are what give adventure gaming a bad name. The title features an interesting story that plods along much too slowly, poorly designed puzzles that rely on guesses or unfortunate deus ex machina, and the somewhat unusual requirement that you talk to everyone until they've literally nothing else to say to you. The effect is much more along the lines of an interactive movie, and I have yet to play one of those that shouldn't have just been a movie for me to watch. Beautiful, but with little to offer gamers or puzzle junkies.

**LISA – 6.25**

## REVIEWS



PC

# WARS AND WARRIORS: JOAN OF ARC

WARRIORS OF A FRENCH DYNASTY

**T**his is one of those titles that manages to overcome a number of technical problems and still be a lot of fun to play. It's very unpolished, but incorporating a number of RPG elements into the formula that Koei's had so much success with is such a great idea that Joan of Arc is rather enjoyable nonetheless.

On top of the basic hack n slash chaos that makes up the majority of the game, players can switch between the available heroes (of which there are usually several to choose from), give orders to the other French troops, and power up their warriors Diablo style. The army command element is very rough and basic, but hey – it's more than you've got in similar titles.

New abilities get unlocked through powering up your heroes, which makes them even more unstoppable on the battlefield. Levels showcase a bit of variety, from assaulting and defending castles to massive conflicts on giant, open battlefields.

Holding this back is a general lack of polish. Collision seems off at times, some animations are really jerky, and the AI varies from barely acceptable to downright bad. Despite these, however, it's more than worth your \$30 if you need some quick action to work off that rush-hour aggression. – **ADAM**

THE BOTTOM LINE

**T** 7.5

- **Concept:**  
Use Joan of Arc and six of her famous allies to hack and slash the English out of France
- **Graphics:**  
Very average. Some stuff rocks, other elements... don't
- **Sound:**  
The clang of steel on steel combined with rousing background music, will pump you up to kick some English butt
- **Playability:**  
Combos are so easy to pull off, I don't think I messed up once.
- **Entertainment:**  
Combining Diablo with Dynasty Warriors isn't such a bad idea after all
- **Replay Value:**  
Moderate

## SECOND OPINION

I didn't know Joan wore a scrunchie. Fashion aside, this game is everything from an RTS to a mouse-masher. I liked the power to control, assign experience points, or swap inventory among the heroes. The game's hodge-podge of strengths barely overcomes the questionable AI and generous hit detection.

**KATO – 7.5**

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT  
 ■ **DEVELOPER** ENLIGHT ■ **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 10

## REVIEWS



### GAME BOY ADVANCE

#### A SOUND OF THUNDER

- **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK)
- **PUBLISHER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASE** MARCH 16

I'd like to think that by now, most game developers had realized that box-pushing puzzles are a bad idea. How wrong I am. A Sound of Thunder is chock full of some of the worst box-pushing tasks I've ever seen. Then again, it's also home to some of the worst driving controls and blandest graphics I've seen, so I guess that shouldn't shock me. This title is tied to an upcoming, big budget summer movie of the same name, so if this game is any indication, that movie is going to suck big time. — JEREMY

**T** 4.5

### GAME BOY ADVANCE

#### SONIC BATTLE

- **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK)
- **PUBLISHER** THQ
- **RELEASE** JANUARY 6



Even though Sonic Battle is a pretty game, with colorful and well-executed 3D battle arenas, it doesn't change the fact that I just didn't have any fun playing it. The single player story mode is unbearably repetitive, and the multiplayer games can be equally frustrating since the eight playable characters are seriously unbalanced. Like Fubur in game form, Sonic Battle tires you in by looking good, and then disappoints you with its sheer lack of flavor. — JOE

**E** 6

### GAME BOY ADVANCE

#### ICE NINE

- **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK)
- **PUBLISHER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASE** MARCH 11



on the GBA have a treacherous road to walk. Obviously technological limitations hinder the experience, so the titles have to make up for their grainy graphics with style, personality, and quality action. While Ice Nine is based on the Duke Nukem Advance engine, it doesn't offer the wit or intelligence (or shooting accuracy) of its precursor. Therefore, this is neither a good FPS, nor a good FPS for the GBA. Move along kids, your money is better spent elsewhere. — LISA

**T** 3.75



### THE BOTTOM LINE

EVERYONE  
**E**

6

### GAME BOY ADVANCE

## PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

### PUNCH THE MONKEY

**T**his title is a lot like an oatmeal cookie with thumb tacks in it — parts of it are pretty good, but other parts just hurt. What could have been a solid side-scrolling adventure for kids is hampered by the inclusion of boring isometric stages and a severely uneven difficulty level.

The side-scrolling stages (which, all told, account for only about half of the game) look fantastic, featuring some great animation and large, colorful characters. Until late in the quest, these are pretty simple and kid-friendly, and have a nice open design to them. The isometric stages, however, look fairly dull and lack detail. These areas are split into two different types: open exploration stages and vertically scrolling vehicle stages. The exploration levels simply suck, while the vehicular sections range from amusing to stupefyingly horrible.

The Frogger-inspired log jumping stage is one of the most ill-conceived moments in gaming, and is the perfect example of the uneven difficulty level in this title. I beat the game in about three or four hours, and roughly one of those hours was spent on this level. The control is so awful that endless repetition is the only way to get past it. Up to this point, it's a pretty easy game (afterwards the difficulty continues to change rapidly), but few kids are going to spend the requisite time to pass this unexpectedly hard stage. Instead, they're going to cry to their parents to exchange Pitfall for a title that sucks less. — JEREMY



"Zoinks! Scooby Dool!"

Hopefully, you'll never experience how much this level sucks

Check out this amazingly colorful overhead stage

The aftereffects of a jungle kegger

- **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **DEVELOPER** TORUS GAMES
- **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 24

■ **Concept:**  
Take a classic adventurer, and give him a variety of levels in which to jump and throw rocks

■ **Graphics:**  
The side-scrolling stages look excellent, but the isometric levels are pretty bland

■ **Sound:**  
The music and sound effects are so forgettable they may as well not exist

■ **Playability:**  
Depending on the stage, the control scheme ranges from fine to terrible

■ **Entertainment:**  
For everything it does right, there's something done wrong to balance it out

■ **Replay Value:**  
Low

### SECOND OPINION

This game could have really easily nestled comfortably into that coveted "average, but not bad" score range if it weren't for the weirdly inconsistent level of difficulty and graphical downfall in the isometric levels. Going for a Rayman 3 feel would have suited the title more aptly and allowed for the best parts of the game (character and level designs in the pleasantly colorful side-scrolling levels) to shine. Instead, isometric searching or driving areas are dull at best and prohibitively enraging at worst. In addition, the whimsical (and that's a good thing) characters are lost in these stages and replaced with bland sprites that twirl around or throw rocks. It's a bummer really, because I would have liked to see a nice old-school treasure-seeking quest out of this game — like a fanciful, funny Tomb Raider. — LISA - 6



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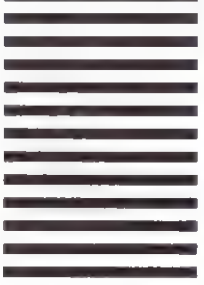
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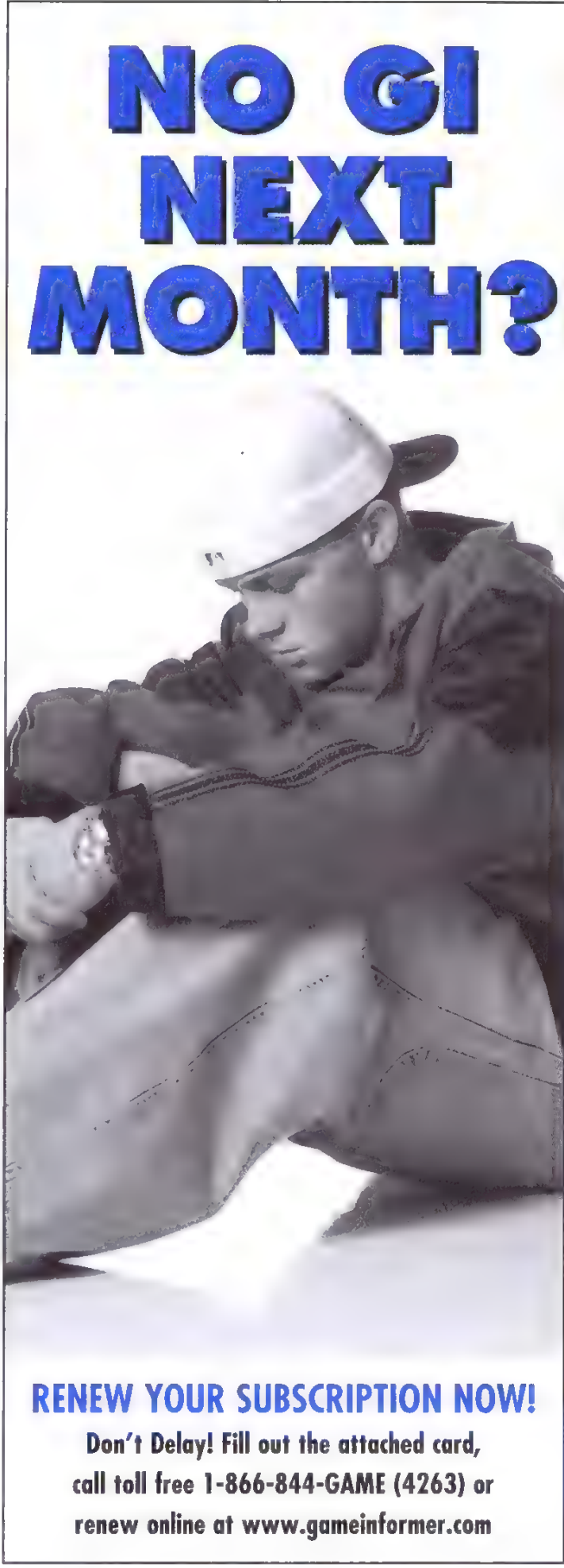
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# CHARTS

In association with the NPD TRSTS Video Games Service, Charts presents an in-depth listing of the best-selling software on a month-to-month basis. Are the games you spend your hard-earned dollars on top sellers? Take a look below to find out. We've also compiled a listing of the top-selling Japanese software, and, of course, we included a Top 10 list of the games the GI staff is currently enjoying.



## NPD TOP 20

Rankings Based Upon NPD Data For November 2003 Based On Units Sold

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
1	N/A	NFL Street	PS2	7.75	Jan-04	\$49

A lot of popular sports seem to be getting "street" games lately. Basketball, football... what's next? Well, we here at Game Informer have a suggestion: CCA (Canadian Curling Association) Street! Nothing says excitement quite like watching flannel-clad Canadians shimmy around a granite block, fervently flailing at the gravel and concrete with plastic brooms. Fun, eh?

2	N/A	Sonic Heroes	GC	7.75	Jan-04	\$50
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As a sound wave enters your ear, it passes down the ear canal and strikes your eardrum, which vibrates. These vibrations are passed along to the hearing nerve in the inner ear via tiny bones. Small nerve endings in the cochlea convert the vibrations into electro-chemical impulses, which are then interpreted by the brain as sound. Three cheers for your ear: a real-life "sonic hero."

3	6	Need for Speed: Underground	PS2	9.5	Nov-03	\$50
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We were recently told that instead of featuring cars and city streets, the sequel to this title would feature gophers tearing around their underground tunnels at top speed. Of course, then we realized that we being informed of all of this by a suspicious-looking gopher in a miniature business suit. We promptly shooed him out the door, then returned to our desks in a quiet and orderly fashion.

4	N/A	NFL Street	Xbox	7.75	Jan-04	\$49
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Oh! Or, instead of moving obscure professional sports to the street, we could move traditional street sports to the professionals. Finally we could play games like ESPN Kick the Can 2005, Pro Hop-Scotch Xtreme, and Fenton Mazor's Mumblety-Peg Challenge. If you do well enough, you could even unlock various regional dialects for trash-talking your opponents! Wicked-awesome!

5	4	Grand Theft Auto Double Pack	Xbox	10	Oct-03	\$43
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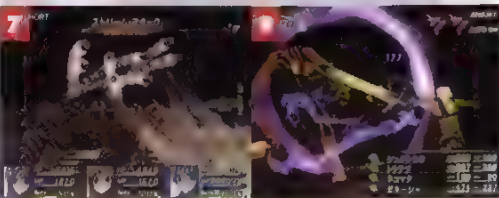
Rather than complain about the violence in these popular titles, concerned parent groups should harness the series' appeal to educate and instruct their children. They could make GTA: The Trial, a courtroom simulator in which Tommy Vercetti brutally consults with his attorney, wantonly testifies in his own defense, and causes maximum carnage with his heartfelt repentance. Totally sweet? Guilty as charged!

RANK	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM	SCORE	RELEASE DATE	PRICE POINT
6	1	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	GC	9.25	Nov-03	\$50
7	19	Halo	Xbox	9.5	Nov-01	\$29
8	8	True Crime: Streets of LA	PS2	8.5	Nov-03	\$47
9	10	Madden NFL 2004	PS2	9.25	Aug-03	\$50
10	N/A	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	PS2	8.5	Jan-04	\$50
11	5	SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	PS2	9	Nov-03	\$50
12	3	Final Fantasy X-2	PS2	8.75	Nov-03	\$49
13	N/A	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	PS2	7.5	Dec-03	\$50
14	9	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	GBA	9.5	Oct-03	\$30
15	N/A	Need for Speed: Underground	Xbox	9.25	Nov-03	\$50
16	N/A	NFL Street	GC	7.75	Jan-04	\$49
17	17	NBA Live 2004	PS2	8.5	Oct-03	\$49
18	N/A	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	PS2	9.5	Nov-03	\$47
19	N/A	Rainbow Six 3	Xbox	8.5	Oct-03	\$51
20	N/A	SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	PS2	9.5	Apr-03	\$20

## JAPAN TOP 10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

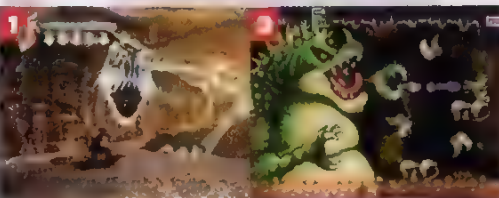
POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	PS2
2	N/A	Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	GBA
3	N/A	Puyo Pop Fever	PS2
4	N/A	Victorious Boxers 2	PS2
5	N/A	Yu-Gi-Oh! Dual Monsters Expert 3	GBA
6	1	Mega Man EXE 4 Tournament: Blue Moon/Red Sun	GBA
7	N/A	Star Ocean 3: Till the End of Time Director's Cut	PS2
8	N/A	Gyakuten Saiban 3	GBA
9	N/A	Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne Maniacs	PS2
10	N/A	Air Force Delta: Blue Wing Knights	PS2



## GAME INFORMER TOP 10

The Staff's Favorite Picks

POS.	L. MO	GAME	SYSTEM
1	N/A	Ninja Gaiden	Xbox
2	1	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	GC
3	2	Metroid Zero Mission	GBA
4	N/A	MVP Baseball 2004	Multi
5	N/A	Fight Night 2004	Multi
6	3	Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	GBA
7	4	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Multi
8	N/A	Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution	GC
9	5	Lifeline	PS2
10	N/A	Colin McRae Rally 4	Xbox



## PC TOP 10

Based On Monthly Units Sold. Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment

POS.	L. MO	GAME	MONTH	PRICE
1	2	Call Of Duty	Oct-03	\$45
2	N/A	The Sims Deluxe Edition	Sep-02	\$20
3	1	The Sims: Makin' Magic	Oct-03	\$29
4	9	Age Of Mythology	Nov-03	\$34
5	5	The Sims Double Deluxe	Sep-03	\$37
6	3	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	Aug-03	\$29
7	N/A	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Nov-03	\$47
8	N/A	Sim City 4 Deluxe	Sep-03	\$35
9	N/A	The Sims: Unleashed	Sep-02	\$28
10	N/A	Final Fantasy XI	Oct-03	\$49





# NEW RELEASES ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CALL YOUR LOCAL RETAILER FOR MORE DETAILS

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
<b>PLAYSTATION 2</b>		
4/6/04	Alias	Acclaim
3/23/04	All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim
3/23/04	Backyard Baseball	Atari
3/30/04	Dinomon Sea 2	Koei
3/23/04	Cy Girls	Konami
5/3/04	Daredevil	Encore Software
3/29/04	Destruction Derby Arena	Take 2 Interactive
6/1/04	Driver 3	Atari

## DRIVER 3

■ **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, PC ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING ■ **PUBLISHER** ATARI ■ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1



For years gamers have been asking the question: "When is Driver 3 coming out?" Now a better query might be: "Will anyone care when it does come out?" The Grand Theft Auto franchise has undoubtedly stolen the action/racing crown from Tanner (perhaps permanently), and after playing any number of GTA clones like The Getaway, True Crime, and Mafia, one wonders how much room is left in the market for another big budget crime epic. Still, those screens seem to point to the fact that the game's years in development have been well spent.

3/23/04	ESPN Major League Baseball	Sega
6/15/04	Fast and the Furious: The Fast	Vivendi Universal
3/22/04	Fight Night 2004	Electronic Arts
3/23/04	Fina Fantasy XI Online	Atari
9/14/04	Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	Atari
4/1/04	Funkmaster Digital Hit Factory	XS Games
3/30/04	Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave
6/1/04	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
3/15/04	Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	Ubisoft
7/1/04	Gradius V	Konami
7/1/04	Gran Turismo 4	Sony
5/3/04	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
5/3/04	Headhunter: Redemption	Sega
4/20/04	Hitman Contracts	Eidos
9/14/04	King of Fighters 3D: Maximum Impact	SNK Neo Geo
9/15/04	Lobo	Nemco
8/2/04	Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts
5/11/04	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom
7/1/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
3/16/04	M.U.B. 2005	Sony
9/1/04	NARC	Midway
4/5/04	NBA Ballers	Midway
7/1/04	NCAA Football 2005	Electronic Arts
5/4/04	Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	Capcom
3/23/04	Onimusha Blade Warriors	Capcom
6/1/04	PSi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway
3/23/04	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft
4/27/04	Red Dead Revolver	Take 2 Interactive
3/30/04	Resident Evil Outbreak	Capcom
3/23/04	Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega
4/12/04	Serious Sam Next Encounter	Take 2 Interactive
3/23/04	Seven Samurai 20XX	Sammy Studios
6/22/04	Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
5/4/04	Shrek 2	Activision
6/29/04	Spider-Man 2	Activision
5/3/04	Spinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
5/14/04	Spy Fiction	Sammy Studios
8/2/04	Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	Square Enix
8/16/04	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts
6/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
3/30/04	Strike Force Bowling	Crave
5/4/04	Syphon Filter: Omega Strain	Grave
5/1/04	Ten Pin Alley 2	XS Games
4/11/04	Transformers	Atari
3/23/04	Trival Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
4/12/04	UFC: Submission Impact	TDK Med active
7/1/04	Van Heising	Vivendi Universal
7/1/04	Warriors: The	Take 2 Interactive
4/6/04	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
3/16/04	X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi Universal
8/17/04	Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	Atari

## GAMECUBE

5/10/04	Custom Robo	Nintendo
3/30/04	Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave
5/3/04	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
5/16/04	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume
8/2/04	Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts
5/11/04	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom
7/1/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
3/23/04	Nassion Impossible: Operation Surma	Atari
7/1/04	NCAA Football 2005	Electronic Arts
7/1/04	Pikmin 2	Nintendo
3/22/04	Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo
5/3/04	Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft
3/23/04	Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega
4/12/04	Serious Sam: Word to the Mothership	Take 2 Interactive
5/4/04	Shrek 2	Activision
4/6/04	Space Raiders	Tommo
6/29/04	Spider-Man: The Movie 2	Activision
5/3/04	Spinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
6/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
7/13/04	Tales of Symphonia	Namco
4/5/04	WarioWare Inc: Mega Party Games	Nintendo
5/3/04	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
9/7/04	Zoids: Legacy	Atari

Release Date	Title	Publisher/Distributor
<b>XBOX</b>		
9/1/04	Advent Rising	Majesco
4/6/04	Alias	Acclaim
3/16/04	Breakdown	Namco
6/1/04	Chronicles of Riddick	Vivendi Universal
5/3/04	Daredevil	Encore Software
9/1/04	Dead or Alive 4	Tecmo
6/1/04	Dead or Alive Ultimate	Tecmo
3/24/04	Dinosaur Hunting	Metro3D
6/1/04	Doom 3	Activision
6/1/04	Driver 3	Atari
3/23/04	ESPN Major League Baseball	Electronic Arts
6/1/04	Fable	Microsoft
3/22/04	Fight Night 2004	Electronic Arts
6/8/04	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ
4/1/04	Funkmaster Digital Hit Factory	XS Games
3/30/04	Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave
6/1/04	Fuzion Frenzy 2	Microsoft
6/1/04	Ghost Master	Vivendi Universal
9/1/04	Halo 2	Microsoft
5/3/04	Hardcore 4x4	XS Games
5/3/04	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
5/3/04	Headhunter: Redemption	Sega
4/20/04	Hitman Contracts	Eidos
9/15/04	Lobo	Nemco
8/2/04	Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts
4/20/04	Manhunt	Take 2 Interactive
5/4/04	Metal Slug 3	SNK Neo Geo
7/1/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
9/1/04	NARC	Midway
4/5/04	NBA Ballers	Midway
7/1/04	NCAA Football 2005	Electronic Arts
6/1/04	Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee 2	Microsoft
7/1/04	Pilot Down	Dreamcatcher
6/1/04	PSi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway
5/4/04	Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft
3/23/04	Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega
6/22/04	Shadow OPS: Red Mercury	Atari
6/22/04	Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
5/4/04	Shrek 2	Activision
6/29/04	Spider-Man 2	Activision
3/23/04	Spinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
8/16/04	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts
6/1/04	Starcraft: Ghost	Vivendi Universal
6/1/04	Sudeki	Microsoft
5/3/04	Theft: Deadly Shadows	Eidos
3/23/04	Trival Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
8/2/04	Unseen, The	Microsoft
4/26/04	Van Heising	Vivendi Universal
3/23/04	Warrior 3D	Acclaim
3/23/04	Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	Konami

## PC

4/6/04	Alias	Acclaim
6/1/04	Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion	Funcom
5/11/04	Backyard Baseball 2005	Atari
3/15/04	Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts
5/28/04	Besiege	Dreamcatcher
4/13/04	Beyond Divinity	Hip Interactive
6/14/04	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts
6/1/04	Black 9	Majesco
3/30/04	Blitzkrieg: Total Challenge	Hip Interactive
4/1/04	Blowout	Majesco
3/23/04	Breed	Hip Interactive
9/15/04	Cell of Cthulhu	Bethesda Softworks
4/28/04	City of Heroes	NC Soft
3/25/04	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	Vivendi Universal
6/1/04	Cruise Ship Tycoon 2	Activision
4/1/04	Crusaders: Kings	Strategy First
3/23/04	CSI: Dark Motives	Ubisoft
3/16/04	Dead Man's Hand	Atari
3/23/04	Desert Rats	Encore Software
7/1/04	Doom 3	Activision
4/1/04	Drake	Majesco

## VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

■ **FORMAT** PC ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG ■ **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION ■ **RELEASE** JULY 1



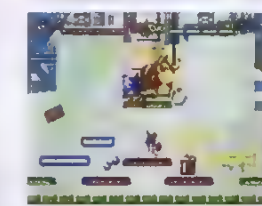
Although it didn't get much attention last E3, when the PC world was focused on Half-Life 2, Doom 3, and Worlds of Warcraft, Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines was a standout in a field crowded with too much typical fantasy fare. Its gothic sensibility and sick sense of humor should reach out to gamers with a taste for the dark side, and its gorgeous visuals (the game uses a version of the Half-Life 2 engine) should hook everyone else. Even better, it looks to be loaded to hilt with character customization and deep action/RPG gameplay.

9/1/04	Driver 3	Atari
6/1/04	Dungeon Siege 2	Microsoft
3/26/04	Egyptian Prophecy: The	Dreamcatcher
6/1/04	Evanch	NC Soft
3/23/04	Far Cry	Ubisoft
3/16/04	Flight Sim: Commander Pilot	Abacus
3/30/04	Forever: Warriors	Dreamcatcher
6/1/04	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ
3/30/04	Garby Zero	Encore Software

6/8/04	Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	Vivendi Universal
8/2/04	Guild Wars	NC Soft
7/1/04	Half-Life 2	Vivendi Universal
4/6/04	History Channel's Alamo	Activision
4/6/04	Hitman Contracts	Eidos
3/23/04	I of the Dragon, The	Strategy First
3/22/04	Impossible Golf	Vakusoft
7/1/04	Inquisition	Strategy First
6/1/04	Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Electronic Arts
3/15/04	Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	Hip Interactive
4/28/04	Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	NC Soft
3/16/04	Lords of the Realm III	Vivendi Universal
6/1/04	Matrix Online: The	Ubisoft
9/1/04	Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts
5/3/04	Micro Mayhem	Jaleco
3/15/04	Midnight Nowhere	Tri-Synergy
3/15/04	Northland	Tri-Synergy
4/13/04	Pac-Man World 2	Hip Interactive
4/12/04	Pankiller	Dreamcatcher
6/1/04	Perimeter	Codemasters
5/3/04	Quest For Saddam	Tri-Synergy
5/3/04	Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator	Codemasters
6/1/04	Rainbow Six 3: Mission Pack 2	Ubisoft
9/1/04	Rome: Total War	Activision
3/23/04	Sacred	Encore Software
4/6/04	Shadow Vault	Hip Interactive
4/5/04	Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
5/3/04	Shrek 2	Activision
5/4/04	Shrek 2: Activity Center	Activision
8/2/04	Sms 2.0: The	Electronic Arts
6/1/04	Soldiers: Heroes of WW II	Codemasters
5/11/04	Soldier	Encore Software

## MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG

■ **FORMAT** GAME BOY ADVANCE ■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ■ **RELEASE** MAY 24



Nintendo is bringing it back to the old school with the release of Mario vs. Donkey Kong, a side-scrolling GBA action title that stages a rematch of the battle that put the company on the map in the first place. This game is clearly inspired by the original Donkey Kong arcade unit, but brings things into the present day with more complex levels that feature a multitude of obstacles for the portly plumber, including old standbys like spikes, disappearing walls, and conveyor belts. Scoff if you will, but Nintendo rarely fails to deliver on a Mario product.

6/7/04	Spider-Man 2	Activision
3/23/04	Spinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
9/15/04	Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts
7/1/04	Star Wars Galaxies: Space Expansion	LucasArts
3/22/04	Sybenia II	Take 2 Interactive
6/14/04	Ten Pin Alley 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Vivendi Universal
5/3/04	Theft: Deadly Shadows	Eidos
3/29/04	Third Wave	Take 2 Interactive
6/1/04	Train Simulator 2.0	Microsoft
4/27/04	Trival Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari
6/4/04	True Crime: Streets of LA	Activision
9/15/04	Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts
3/16/04	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari
7/1/04	Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines	Activision
3/30/04	War Times	Strategy First
7/1/04	WarTime Command: Battle for Europe	Codemasters
5/3/04	World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco
1/11/04	Worlds of Warcraft	Vivendi Universal
3/3/04	Yager	Encore Software
6/1/04	Zoo Tycoon 2.0	Microsoft

## GAME BOY ADVANCE

3/30/04	CT Special Forces 2: Back in the Trenches	Hip Interactive
9/7/04	Disney's Aladdin	Capcom
3/15/04	Disney's Home on the Range	Disney Interactive
9/7/04	Disney's Magical Quest 3	Capcom
3/30/04	Dr. Seuss: The Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal
6/29/04	Dragon Ball Z: Super Sonic Warriors	Atari
6/1/04	Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	Atari
5/3/04	Hardcore Pool	Telegames
5/3/04	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
3/16/04	Little League Baseball	NewKiCo
8/2/04	Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts
6/28/04	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo
5/24/04	Mario vs. Donkey Kong	Nintendo
5/11/04	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom
6/8/04	Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun	Capcom
8/17/04	Meta: Slug Advance: Survival Mission	SNK Neo Geo
3/15/04	Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Destination Software
9/1/04	Oggy and the Cockroaches	Telegames
8/31/04	River City Ransom	Atari
3/19/04	R-Type III	Destination Software
3/15/04	Scooby Doo Two: Monsters Unleashed	THQ
4/12/04	Serious Sam Advance	Take 2 Interactive
4/20/04	Shining Soul 2	Atari
5/4/04	Shrek 2	Activision
6/1/04	Spider-Man 2	Activision
3/23/04	Spinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft
3/15/04	Street Jam Basketball	Destination Software
3/31/04	Ultimate Card Games	Telegames
3/15/04	Wade Hatton's Counter Punch Boxing	Destination Software
9/7/04	Zoids: Legacy	Atari

# SECRET ACCESS

## JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING



Game Informer recently had the good fortune to ask Jason VandenBerghe, the lead designer of 007: Everything Or Nothing, what advice he would offer players of his game. Read on, and find out what kinds of nifty things the developers know that you don't (besides how to create an awesome game).

### Strategy: Use cover, use cover, use cover

Folks who have played a lot of Everything or Nothing agree: You need to get good at using cover to beat the game. In fact, many of our later levels were built explicitly around the cover mechanics of the game. Remember that Bond can fire at his enemies from cover while remaining almost completely protected. Try shooting while crouched behind a crate and from around corners. And, of course, using corner mode to peek at what's ahead without being seen is always handy.

### Trick: Leave a Q-spider near armor

Early in the game Q gives Bond the Q-spider: a remote control reconnaissance (and later, destruction) device with a look intended to frighten (try making the Q-spider visible to the enemy guards; seeing a mechanical spider come walking into the room can un-man even hardened mercenaries). A non-highlighted feature of the Q-spider is that it will recharge Bond's armor using any armor vests it comes across.

So, here's a trick (originally discovered by one of our programmers): Get Bond up to full armor. Take your Q-spider out, and find yourself some unguarded armor. Return to Bond, leaving the Q-spider near the armor. Continue. If Bond is wounded during the battle, you will be able to select the spider in your inventory, and the moment you activate your dormant spider, Bond's armor will be restored.

### Strategy: Use Bond sense

Bond's instincts are razor-sharp: to simulate this, we slow the world way down during inventory selection and let the player take a look around in relative safety (careful, you're not invulnerable in this mode!). If you move the camera while in this mode, you'll notice that certain objects in the world give off an attention indicator. This mode lets you lock onto objects (such as explosive barrels or electrical equipment) that can be used as a weapon. It's easy to overlook the usefulness of Bond sense; it's quite handy, both for destroying objects and for just taking a breather during combat and making a plan.

Also, try pushing R1 (on PS2) when you have an object locked on in Bond sense: you'll zoom in on that object, and get some status information on it as well.

### Secret: Weapon and armor cache in the plantation house

The mission "Faded Splendor" takes place in a New Orleans plantation house, and is about halfway through the game. The mission is filled with sniper rifle wielding guards and tight corridors; not ideal under any circumstances. However, there's a weapon and armor cache hidden in the house that will make any agent's life a lot easier.

The cache is hidden behind a secret panel in one of the rooms on the second floor. To reach it, go up the right side of (when facing the base of the grand central stairway) the staircase to the top, and enter the room to the left. Against the back corner is a hidden switch that will open the secret panel.

Also, look for a Q-spider tunnel near the base of that staircase.

### Secret: Locate the Q-spider tunnels

Speaking of the Q-spider, it can go lots of places Bond can't in Everything

or Nothing. Here are a few:

In "Vertigo," look for a hole in a wall near where the rocket launcher-wielding guard has hunkered down behind his sandbags. Send the Q-spider in this hole, and you will eventually find yourself in a closet with a blocked door. The spider can bump the door open (from this side), and take out the guards in the other room. When Bond reaches that chamber, he'll find that the closet is a weapons cache. Lovely!

In "The Ruined Tower," there's a path the Q-spider can take to reach the rocket launcher-wielding guard. You'll have to find it yourself, though.

The most complex Q-spider puzzle is in "Dangerous Descent" late in the game. Right at the beginning of the level, there is a path off to the left that will take you to an enemy guarding a vault door. Wait until this guard has opened the vault, and then take him out.

When you later play the mission titled "Everything or Nothing," you come across this vault door again. If you succeeded in opening it in the previous mission, it will be open here. The vault contains a weapons and armor cache.

### Strategy: Use "found" explosives against Jean LeRouge

Midway through the game, Bond must confront Jean LeRouge, a ruthless and sadistic killer wielding a crossbow that shoots explosive-tipped bolts, in a dark and cramped crematorium. LeRouge is fast, and cannot be attacked hand-to-hand; fighting LeRouge is all about using cover effectively. To make matters worse, he's got Mya dangling from a hook on her way into the furnace. It's a tough fight.

However, the observant player will notice that the place is littered with kerosene canisters and other explosive objects. LeRouge is likely going to use these against you, so you might as well turn the tables on him (remember to use Bond sense to target them).

### Trick: Sniper rifle + thermographic vision = fun

Once you reach the top of the bell tower in "Death's Door," instead of rappelling back down immediately, try putting on your thermographic vision, pulling out your sniper rifle, and, well, I'm sure you can imagine the rest. Those mafia goons figure you can't see them through the trees; prove them wrong.

### Just for fun: Hide and seek

Enemies in Everything or Nothing will start to wonder what's going on if Bond stops attacking them during a firefight. Try finding a spot the enemies won't charge ("Death's Door" is a good mission for this; try hiding in the entryway of the run-down two-story building), and wait out of sight for a while after having shot at your enemies. They'll start to argue with each other about whether or not they've killed Bond, and who should go make sure.

### Strategy: Weapon efficiency is the key to Gold scores

Of all the score categories, weapon efficiency is the key one. "Weapon Efficiency" just means how many shots did you use to take out how many enemies? 100% weapon efficiency means 1 shot per enemy taken down.

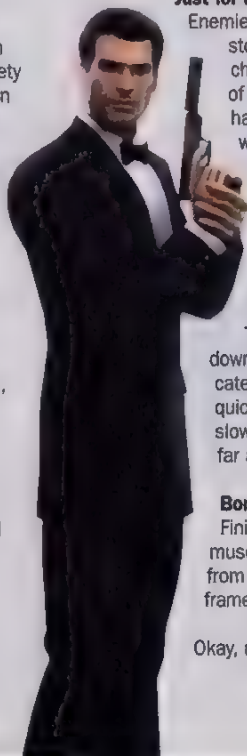
The trick is, the score doesn't cap at 100%; it keeps going. If you take down 20 enemies with 10 shots, you'll get 200% weapon efficiency. This category also has the largest score available, so you can see why our testers quickly came to the conclusion that the way to get the highest score was to go slow and easy, using explosives and grenades where possible, even going so far as to sacrifice some of your time score to increase efficiency.

### Bonus: All missions Gold unlocks the Gallery

Finish the game and get Gold in every mission, and you'll unlock the Gallery, a museum of sorts to Everything or Nothing. We've preserved important artifacts from the game here, from concept art we developed along the way (tastefully framed, of course) to Jaws' teeth (under glass, to prevent decay).

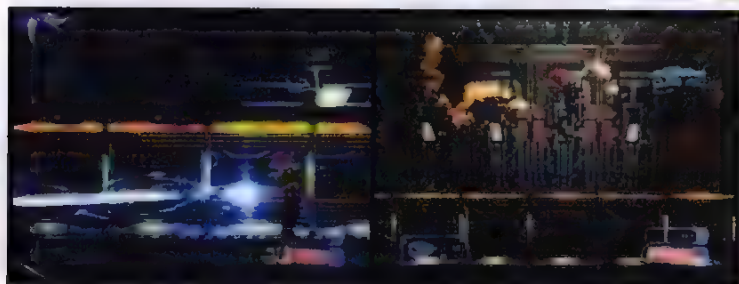
Okay, maybe the decay joke was uncalled for.

Jason VandenBerghe  
Lead Designer, Everything or Nothing Team  
EA Redwood Shores, CA





## BLOWOUT



From the pause screen, go to the cheat menu and enter these codes. A sound will confirm correct entry. Note that you have to choose to enable the cheats after you unlock them with the codes.

**All Weapons** – CHARLIEHUSTLEOVERDRESSEDROME0  
**Big Feet Mode** – DEADREDPARTYSHOES  
**Big Head Mode** – BUTTCHEATCANSURPRISE  
**Clear Map** – YESTERDAYOURZEBRADIE  
**Enemies Thawed Or Frozen** – CHARLIEOSCARLIMADELTA  
**God Mode** – NOPAINNOCAINE  
**Level Select** – COOLLEVELCHEATCODE  
**Level Up Weapons** – FRIENDLIESTGODINGALAXY  
**Restore Health** – CANEREDYTOROCK  
**Time Factor Control** – CHARLIEALPHANOVEMBERECHO  
**Unlimited Ammo** – FISHINABARREL  
**Unlock Doors** – ANYANDALLCODE

Jimmy James  
Akron, OH

## MVP BASEBALL 2004



**Easy MVP Points** – Unlocking all of the legends, stadiums, and uniforms in this year's MVP Baseball could take a lifetime if you play every game. To get the points needed to unlock these secrets in no time flat, enter Dynasty mode, select a playoff contender (Yanks, Cubs), and sim the entire season. By the end of the year (which takes roughly 15 minutes), you should have thousands of MVP Points to spend. Repeat as many times as necessary.

"The Rhino"  
Toledo, OH

## GLADIUS



Enter these codes from the indicated screen. A sound will play to let you know that the code was accepted.

**Full Camera Control** – During combat, pause the game and press Up, Left, Down, Right, Left (x4), Up (x4)  
**Ignore Class Restrictions On Equipment** – In the school menu, pause the game and press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left (x4), Δ (x3)

Aaron Joseph  
Tulsa, OK

## BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II



Wiping the floor with the minions of evil just got a lot easier. Enter these codes during gameplay to give yourself a little boost.

**Cheat Menu (Level Select and Invulnerability)** – Hold L1 + R1 + □ + Δ + ○ + X, and press Start

**Instant Experience and Money** – Hold L1 + R1 + □ + Δ + ○ + X, and press L2

Raquel December  
Nimh, Montana

## I-NINJA



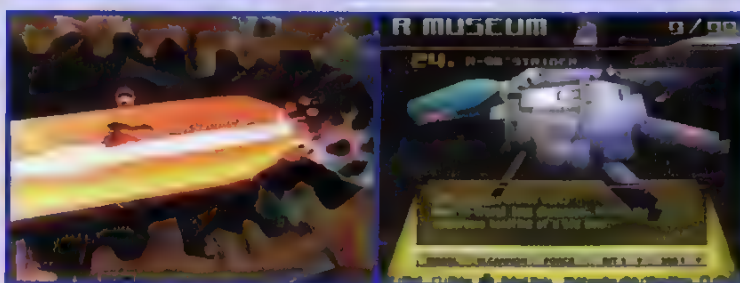
Pause the game, then press these button sequences to enable the cheats.

**Big Head Mode** – Hold R1 and press Δ (x4), release R1, hold L1 and press Δ (x2), release L1, hold L1 + R1 and press Δ, ○, Δ

**Finish Mission** – Hold R1 and press □ (x3), ○, release R1, hold L1 and press Δ (x2), release L1, hold R1 and press □ (x2)

**Sword Upgrade** – Hold L1 + R1 and press ○, □, ○, Δ (x2), □, ○, □

Lucinda Creek  
Hope, NM

CODE OF THE MONTH  
R-TYPE FINAL

Enter these codes while holding L2 on the pause screen. If you do it right, you'll get a confirmation sound.

**Invincibility Toggle** – Right (x2), Left, Right, Left (x2), Right, Left, L1, Up (x2), Down (x2), Up, Down, Up, Down, L1

**Max Blue Weapon Power** – R2 (x2), Left, Right, Up, Down, Right, Left, Up, Down, ○

**Max Dose** – R2 (x2), Left, Right, Up, Down, Right, Left, Up, Down, Δ

**Max Red Weapon Power** – R2 (x2), Left, Right, Up, Down, Right, Left, Up, Down, □

**Max Yellow Power** – R2 (x2), Left, Right, Up, Down, Right, Left, Up, Down, X

## UNLOCK SHIPS

There are a few ships that require passwords to unlock. Just move your cursor over the empty slot with the correct number (you have to advance up to that point in the tree) and press X. That should bring up the password input screen.

#3 (Lady Love) – 5270 0725

#24 (Strider) – 2078 0278

#59 (Mr. Hell) – 1026 2001

#100 (Curtain Call) – 1009 9201

Jeff McQueen  
Frederick, WI

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING



While paused, hold all four shoulder buttons while entering these codes.

### ARAGORN

1,000 Experience - Up, □, △, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - Up, □, △, Down  
 All Special Upgrades - Down, ○, △ (x2)  
 All Three-Hit Combos - □, Down, ○, Up  
 Full Missiles - △, □ (x2), △  
 Instant Level 8 - Up, □, △, Up

### FARAMIR

1,000 Experience - □, △, Up, □  
 All Four-Hit Combos - ×, □, Up, ×  
 All Three-Hit Combos - □, △, Up, △  
 Full Missiles - △, Up, × (x2)  
 Instant Level 8 - ○, Down (x3)

### FRODO

1,000 Experience - Down, △, Up, Down  
 All Four-Hit Combos - Down, □, Down, ○  
 All Three-Hit Combos - □, Down, △, □  
 Full Missiles - △ (x3), ○  
 Instant Level 8 - ○ (x2), Down (x2)

### GANDALF

1,000 Experience - ○, △, Up, Down  
 All Four-Hit Combos - Down, △, Up, ○  
 All Special Upgrades - Up, Down, △, ○  
 All Three-Hit Combos - Down, ×, △, Down  
 Full Missiles - △, Down, ×, □  
 Instant Level 8 - ○, □, Down (x2)

### GMIJ

1,000 Experience - ○ (x2), △, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - △, □, Up, ×  
 All Three-Hit Combos - Up, □, ○, □  
 Full Missiles - ○ (x3), ×  
 Instant Level 8 - ×, ○, Down, □

### LEGOLAS

1,000 Experience - ×, △, Up, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - ×, ○, △, □  
 All Special Upgrades - △, ○, ×, ○  
 All Three-Hit Combos - □, △ (x2), ○  
 Full Missiles - △ (x3), Down  
 Instant Level 8 - □, Up (x2), Down

### MERRY

1,000 Experience - Down (x2), □, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - □, ×, □ (x2)  
 All Three-Hit Combos - △, ×, Up, △  
 Full Missiles - □, ○ (x2), △  
 Instant Level 8 - Down, △, ×, □

### PIPPIN

1,000 Experience - △, ×, □, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - × (x2), Down, ○  
 All Three-Hit Combos - Up (x2), □, ○  
 Full Missiles - Up, ○, Down, □  
 Instant Level 8 - □, Up (x2), ○

### SAM

1,000 Experience - △, ×, Down, ×  
 All Four-Hit Combos - Up, Down, △ (x2)  
 All Three-Hit Combos - □, ×, ○, □  
 Full Missiles - × (x2), ○, ×  
 Instant Level 8 - ○ (x2), △ (x2)

### DO-OR CODES

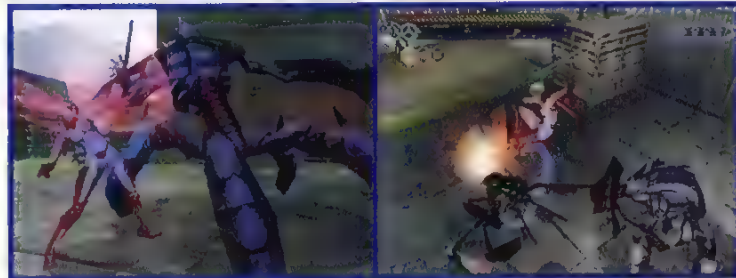
Infinite Respawns - ○, □, Up, ○  
 Share Experience - Down, × (x3)

### UNLOCKABLES

Interviews - ×, □, ×, Up  
 Unlock Faramir - × (x2), △ (x2)  
 Unlock Frodo - △, ○ (x3)  
 Unlock Merry - ×, Down (x2), ×  
 Unlock Pippin - △, ○, □, Down

Peter Truax  
 New Ulm, MN

## NIGHTSHADE



There's a whole lot of stuff to unlock if you've got the skills. Here's what you need to do.

### COSTUMES

Hibana's 2nd Costume - Beat Normal difficulty  
 Hibana's 3rd Costume - Beat Hard difficulty  
 Hisui's 2nd Costume - Collect all 88 Clan Coins

### CHARACTERS

Play As Hisui - Beat Easy difficulty  
 Play As Hotsuma - Using a memory card with a completed Shinobi save, beat Nightshade on Normal difficulty  
 Play As Joe Musashi - Beat a total of 88 stages

### BONUS LEVELS

Mission Mode Stage 1 - Collect 3 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 2 - Collect 14 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 3 - Collect 24 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 4 - Collect 35 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 5 - Collect 45 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 6 - Collect 56 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 7 - Collect 68 secret clan coins  
 Mission Mode Stage 8 - Collect 80 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 1 - Collect 10 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 2 - Collect 21 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 3 - Collect 31 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 4 - Collect 42 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 5 - Collect 52 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 6 - Collect 64 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 7 - Collect 76 secret clan coins  
 Survival Mode Stage 8 - Collect 88 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 1 - Collect 7 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 2 - Collect 17 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 3 - Collect 28 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 4 - Collect 38 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 5 - Collect 49 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 6 - Collect 60 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 7 - Collect 72 secret clan coins  
 Time Attack Mode Stage 8 - Collect 84 secret clan coins

Joe Trednock  
 Carcer, NV

## MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Enter this while playing (not while paused, for once), then start a new game from the main menu. You should have the option of any mode and level.

All Modes And Level Select - □ (x3), ×, Left, Right, Left, Right, □ (x3), ×, Left, Right, Left, Right

Trevor Eldorado  
 Sante Fe, NM

## BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II



Did you ever want to stomp all over everything? Here's your ticket - just enter these codes during gameplay.

Cheat Menu (Level Select And Invulnerability) - Hold L Button + R Button + X + Y + A + B, and press Start  
 Instant Experience And Money - Hold L Button + R Button + A + B + X + Y, and press White

Erin Goldwater  
 Atlanta, GA

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING



While paused, hold both shoulder buttons while entering these codes.

### ARAGORN

**1,000 Experience** – Up, X, Y, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Up, X, Y, Down  
**All Special Upgrades** – Down, B, Y (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – X, Down, B, Up  
**Full Missiles** – Y, X (x2), Y  
**Instant Level 8** – Up, X, Y, Up

### FARAMIR

**1,000 Experience** – X, Y, Up, X  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A, X, Up, A  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – X, Y, Up, Y  
**Full Missiles** – Y, Up, A (x2)  
**Instant Level 8** – B, Down (x3)

### FRODO

**1,000 Experience** – Down, Y, Up, Down  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Down, X, Down, B  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – X, Down, Y, X  
**Full Missiles** – Y (x3), B  
**Instant Level 8** – B (x2), Down (x2)

### GANDALF

**1,000 Experience** – B, Y, Up, Down  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Down, Y, Up, B  
**All Special Upgrades** – Up, Down, Y, B  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Down, A, Y, Down  
**Full Missiles** – Y, Down, A, X  
**Instant Level 8** – B, X, Down (x2)

### GIMLI

**1,000 Experience** – B (x2), Y, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Y, X, Up, A  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Up, X, B, X  
**Full Missiles** – B (x3), A  
**Instant Level 8** – A, B, Down, X

### LEGOLAS

**1,000 Experience** – A, Y, Up, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A, B, Y, X  
**All Special Upgrades** – Y, B, A, B  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – X, Y (x2), A  
**Full Missiles** – Y (x3), Down  
**Instant Level 8** – X, Up (x2), Down

### MERRY

**1,000 Experience** – Down (x2), X, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – X, A, X (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Y, A, Up, Y  
**Full Missiles** – X, B (x2), Y  
**Instant Level 8** – Down, Y, A, X

### PIPPIN

**1,000 Experience** – Y, A, X, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A (x2), Down, B  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Up (x2), X, B  
**Full Missiles** – Up, B, Down, X  
**Instant Level 8** – X, Up (x2), B

### SAM

**1,000 Experience** – Y, A, Down, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Up, Down, Y (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – X, A, B, X  
**Full Missiles** – A (x2), B, A  
**Instant Level 8** – B (x2), Y (x2)

### CO-OP CODES

**Infinite Respawns** – B, X, Up, B  
**Share Experience** – Down, A (x3)

### UNLOCKABLES

**All Interviews** – A, X, A, Up  
**Unlock Faramir** – A (x2), Y (x2)  
**Unlock Frodo** – Y, B (x3)  
**Unlock Merry** – A, Down (x2), A  
**Unlock Pippin** – Y, B, X, Down

*"GI Droid"*

*(location unknown – last seen signing every single free agent in baseball for the Yankees)*

## I-NINJA

Pause the game, then press these button sequences to enable the cheats.

**Big Head Mode** – Hold R Button, then press Y (x4), release R Button, hold L Button, then press Y (x2), release L Button, hold R Button + L Button, then press Y, X, Y  
**Finish Mission** – Hold R Button, then press, B (x3), X, release R Button, hold L Button, then press Y (x2), release L Button, hold R Button, then press B (x2)  
**Sword Upgrade** – Hold L Button + R Button, then press X, B, X, Y (x2), B, X, B

Jenny Gorman  
Mobile, AL

## GLADIUS

Enter these codes from the indicated screen. A sound will play to let you know that the code was accepted.

**Full Camera Control** – During combat, pause the game and press Up, Left, Down, Right, Left (x4), Up (x4)

**Ignore Class Restrictions On Equipment** – On the school menu, pause the game and press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left (x4), Y (x3)

Ed Twohy  
Washington, D.C.

## THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING



While paused, hold both shoulder buttons while entering these codes.

### ARAGORN

**1,000 Experience** – Up, B, Y, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Up, B, Y, Down  
**All Special Upgrades** – Down, X, Y (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – B, Down, X, Up  
**Full Missiles** – Y, B (x2), Y  
**Instant Level 8** – Up, B, Y, Up

### FARAMIR

**1,000 Experience** – B, Y, Up, B  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A, B, Up, A  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – B, Y, Up, Y  
**Full Missiles** – Y, Up, A (x2)  
**Instant Level 8** – X, Down (x3)

### FRODO

**1,000 Experience** – Down, Y, Up, Down  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Down, B, Down, X  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – B, Down, Y, B  
**Full Missiles** – Y (x3), X  
**Instant Level 8** – X (x2), Down (x2)

### GANDALF

**1,000 Experience** – X, Y, Up, Down  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Down, Y, Up, X  
**All Special Upgrades** – Up, Down, Y, X  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Down, A, Y, Down  
**Full Missiles** – Y, Down, A, B  
**Instant Level 8** – X, B, Down (x2)

### GIMLI

**1,000 Experience** – X (x2), Y, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Y, B, Up, A  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Up, B, X, B  
**Full Missiles** – X (x3), A  
**Instant Level 8** – A, X, Down, B

### LEGOLAS

**1,000 Experience** – A, Y, Up, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A, X, Y, B  
**All Special Upgrades** – Y, X, A, X  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – B, Y (x2), X  
**Full Missiles** – Y (x3), Down  
**Instant Level 8** – B, Up (x2), Down

### MERRY

**1,000 Experience** – Down (x2), B, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – B, A, B (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Y, A, Up, Y  
**Full Missiles** – B, X (x2), Y  
**Instant Level 8** – Down, Y, A, B

### PIPPIN

**1,000 Experience** – Y, A, B, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – A (x2), Down, X  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – Up (x2), B, X  
**Full Missiles** – Up, X, Down, B  
**Instant Level 8** – B, Up (x2), X

### SAM

**1,000 Experience** – Y, A, Down, A  
**All Four-Hit Combos** – Up, Down, Y (x2)  
**All Three-Hit Combos** – B, A, X, B  
**Full Missiles** – A (x2), X, A  
**Instant Level 8** – X (x2), Y (x2)

### CO-OP CODES

**Infinite Respawns** – X, B, Up, X  
**Share Experience** – X, A (x3)

### UNLOCKABLES

**All Interviews** – A, B, A, Up  
**Unlock Faramir** – A (x2), Y (x2)  
**Unlock Frodo** – Y, X (x3)  
**Unlock Merry** – A, Down (x2), A  
**Unlock Pippin** – Y, X, B, Down

Wendy Beakman  
Last Chance, UT

## THE REVIVAL OF ADVENTURE GAMING

DUST OFF YOUR ADVENTURING CAP



In an era where many games seem derivative, and every developer is trying to find the next *WarCraft* or *Halo*, it may be difficult to remember the times when today's prevailing gaming genres like first-person shooters and real-time strategy were still in their infancy. In those days, there was another type of game that sustained those of us hungry for stunning visuals and involved stories: the graphic adventure. Lacking what many people today would consider necessities, like loads of options and fast-paced action, what these titles did provide was the freedom to explore and solve puzzles in detailed, interactive worlds.

Unfortunately, with the advent of 3D gaming and

more action-oriented titles, gamers began to be tempted into areas where adventure games couldn't deliver and still remain adventure games. And so it happened that after a few weak entries that tried to fuse 3D environments, combat, and quests; adventure gaming as we knew it unceremoniously fizzled out (aside from *Myst*, which lacks the onscreen avatars and extensive inventories of the classic adventure titles).

Thankfully, there are those today who wish for a rebirth of the genre, or at least to raise awareness



Some of the Phoenix Freeware team at voice auditions in New York

of the amazing depth and quality of these all but forgotten games. And what better way to draw people's attention than by resurrecting the flag-

ship series, Sierra's *King's Quest*, which reigned supreme in its day with eight entries and millions of copies sold. Using *King's Quest* as a vehicle, the fan-based organizations Anonymous Game Developers Interactive and Phoenix Freeware have each made unique and significant contributions to the cause of keeping the flame of adventure games alive.

### GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME | BY DAVID STROUD



Every month one of Game Informer's readers picks his or her personal choice for Greatest Game Of All Time.

#### QUAKE

■ **FORMAT** PC  
■ **PUBLISHER** ID SOFTWARE

"Blood, Guts, and Glory" – the three words that are ubiquitously shouted out by dorks everywhere as the perfect rocket blasts giblets of your opponent in every direction. And just like the Dallas Cowboys' defense, what's left isn't pretty. This is the entire basis of Quake for the PC, quite possibly the Greatest Game of All Time. It's true that the graphics are chunkier than the remains you leave behind after eating too much of your school's cafeteria food, but the fact remains that nothing can outperform this timeless classic. This is the title that revolutionized online gaming. Before Quake, there were no

online shoot 'em ups or kill-them-all games: There were just...well...for lack of any better words, games.

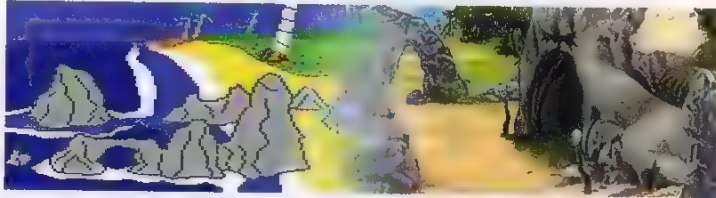
Not only did Quake come with numerous levels that could keep you busy for hours online or offline, this was also one of the first games to widely accept modifications. The timeless Team Fortress and Capture the Flag team mods are implemented in any major game today. And again, just like the Dallas Cowboys, no matter how many hours of practice you put into it, you could rarely call yourself the master. Even after years of playing, new areas are being discovered that you can only get to by

# Game Design & Development

## DEGREE PROGRAM

### AGDI agdinteractive.com

Anonymous Game Developers Interactive (formerly Tierra Entertainment) pays tribute to adventure gaming by revitalizing earlier titles and updating them to the standards of the genre's early-'90s heyday. This means a point-and-click interface and an improved story, along with VGA graphics and even voice packs. AGDI already has remakes of King's Quest I and II under its belt, with Quest for Glory II (from another classic Sierra series) on the way.



*Kolyrna, the setting for King's Quest II, moves into the 21st century*

It all started when Anonymous Game Developers #1 and #2 (an enigmatic tandem who prefer to remain cloaked in mystery) set a challenge for themselves: They wanted to see if they could work on a 1:1 remake of an existing game and actually finish it. When it came to selecting a title, KQ 1 seemed like a natural choice. "It was a relatively simple adventure game," said AGD #2. "The puzzles were very standard as far as adventure games go, and the game did not include many characters. After it became clear that other people might enjoy playing the game, the choice seemed even better: What better way to revive adventure games than by updating the game that essentially started the genre?"

Since that time, the revamped versions have been made available for download on AGDI's website, and have been received with surprising

enthusiasm. Most fans are eager to have the opportunity to play polished versions of their old favorites; in fact, many consider the AGDI versions as a bona fide part of the series. However, just as there are those opposed to remaking old movies, there will always be the game purists who think that original forms shouldn't be sullied with new-fangled additions.

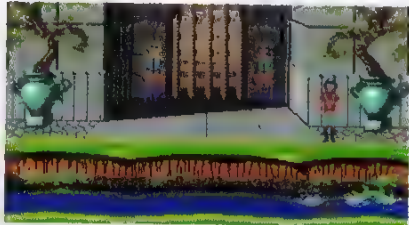
To those few dissenters, the AGDs say: "Everyone's entitled to their opinion, and the solution is

a simple one: If you like the idea of remakes, play them. If not, then play the originals instead."

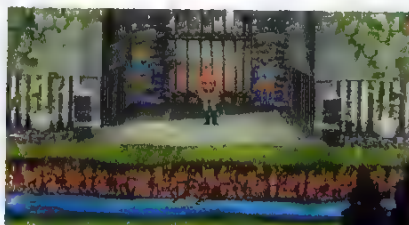
While AGDI's King's Quest remakes are available to download free of charge, it is also in the process of developing a commercial adventure game under the name Himalaya Studios. Staying true to the genre's classic roots, the game will be a hi-res 2D point-and-click adventure. "It's a false belief that everything must go 3D in order to be profitable – or that 2D is inferior simply because it's had a longer history," said AGD #1. "Both 2D and 3D are art forms in their own right, and 2D just happens to be our style of choice. This is the kind of thinking that has all but ended the adventure game genre of yesterday, and it's something that Himalaya Studios is planning to change in a big way!"



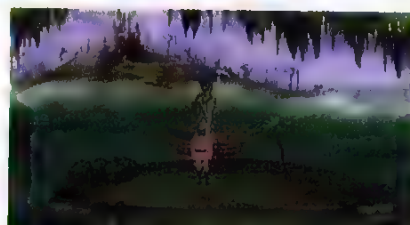
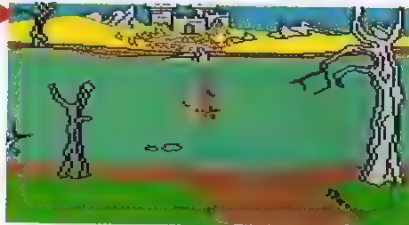
Artwork by Full Sail Student-William "Forrest" Crump



*Dracula's castle really really needs more than 16 colors to produce the proper terrifying effect*



*Sierra's release of King's Quest I, circa 1990...And the same scene in AGDI's 2001 remake*



rocket jumping (you know...the technique you used right before blowing off your legs?) or just plain luck.

Who would've guessed that a game that only required a 75 MHz PC, 8 megs of RAM, and 80 megs of free space could have spawned the continuing saga between the forces of evil and the just plain twisted? Although better games have received worse scores, this game has earned a 10 just for its innovation and sweet memories of uncontrolled world domination.



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## Phoenix Freeware kq9.org

Phoenix Freeware is the force behind the most promising fan-made continuation of the King's Quest series to date. Its project, King's Quest IX: Every Cloak Has a Silver Lining, is the unofficial next chapter in the ongoing saga. We had a chance to chat with Saydmell Salazar and Neil Rodrigues, PR for Phoenix Freeware, about the its goals for the game and the development process behind it.

One of the major hurdles to overcome is returning to the spirit of the series after the previous installment. "King's Quest VIII disappointed a lot of fans," admitted Salazar, "mainly because of the transition to 3D and the introduction of a combat system." The battles came as a particular surprise due to the series' focus on nonviolent ways to overcome obstacles. Added Rodrigues, "We want to bring the series back to life with a fresh look and artistic concept. Though the environments are rendered in 3D, the game still has the classic screen-to-screen, point-and-click interface using icons like 'talk,' 'look,' etc."

The plot of the game is shrouded in extreme secrecy, but we do know that it will try to incorporate all of the major characters and events from previous installments. It also ties up a lot of loose ends and clarifies some confusing connections. Explains Salazar, "Though it answers some old questions, there is a lot of new material. It will be a great entry to the series, but also a very satisfying game on its own."

Because they are essentially adding another chapter to the most renowned and acclaimed adventure series of its age, the developers realize that this game has the potential to attract a lot of attention. It may even force publishers to recognize the sizeable adventure game fan base that still exists, but Phoenix Freeware doesn't expect to single-handedly revitalize the genre. "We are really doing this to make the fans happy, and to hopefully create more adventure game fans," said Rodrigues.

Having recently completed auditions for the characters' voice-actors, KQ IX is progressing nicely, though the release date is still a bit foggy at this point. Since the project involves coordinating over 40 volunteers from all over the world, it is difficult



"Hmm... I probably should have waited for the next one."

to gauge when adventure-starved fans will finally be able to download the free software. It is looking like 2005 at the moment, but in the meantime keep an eye on the website for updates and information.



Expect to travel to a few familiar locations...



... as well as explore some peculiar new surroundings

## Still Ahead

Though King's Quest was the most popular adventure game of its time, it is not the only one that is seeing a renewal of interest. High Voltage Software has a new Leisure Suit Larry in development (though it looks like it will depart significantly from the classic adventure game formula), and it appears that the Space Quest series might receive a new fan-made installment soon. Does this mean that adventure games are coming back? Unfortunately, all we can really do is shrug our shoulders. Apart

from Leisure Suit Larry, there are few "official" attempts to return to the genre. And while groups like AGDI and Phoenix Freeware will allow gamers to reconnect with old favorites, it is no guarantee that publishers will pick up on the trend. In the words of AGD #1, "There's only so much that fan-based projects can do by themselves; there's only a certain amount of impact they can have on the



genre. Fan-made games can garner the attention of commercial companies, but sales figures are ultimately what do the talking." So, while it might be impossible to bring back the adventure gaming glory days of old, it is thrilling that fans today are being given so many exceptional opportunities to relive and remember them.

## THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On April 24th, 1987, history was made in an Ember's restaurant in Madison, WI. The midwestern family restaurant was home to one of the classic Pin-Bot pinball tables, and on that machine a man named James Shird achieved an unbelievable score of 16,569,190 – a world record. Verified by referee and



reported by Twin Galaxies (largely regarded as the authority on video game accomplishments), a higher score has yet to be logged. The closest competitor, officially recorded in 1997, came in a full 16,000,000 points shy.

PLAYSTATION

# SKELETON WARRIORS



RETRO RATING

6.5



Neversoft may have made a name for itself with the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater series, but it got its start with Skeleton Warriors. Based on a television show/toy line, Skeleton Warriors is the story of Prince Lightstar and his nemesis, Baron Dark. Dark, an animate skeleton, commands an army of the living dead, and only Lightstar can stop it. His quest is a fairly typical 2D side-scroller featuring motion-captured enemies. The graphics have held up pretty well for an older PSone title, as has the music, but the gameplay is as ho-hum as possible. Lightstar slashes his way through enemies, collecting the ammo and health they drop, and that's about it. There are a few instances of creative level design, but they are few and far between. The Skybike stages (which features simple third-person flying) break up the hack 'n slash monotony, but they lack any real challenge, are very short, and frankly, aren't much fun. Neversoft has certainly moved on to bigger and better things.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT ■ **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT ENTERTAINMENT ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1996

SNES

# SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV



RETRO RATING

8.75



Dracula just won't stay dead, will he? But in this case, that's a good thing. The Castlevania series has had only a few missteps, and the SNES outing certainly wasn't one of them. Although it feels more cartoonish now than was ever intended, Super Castlevania IV still looks great today, featuring both fantastic sprites and lush environments. The score holds its own with many of today's titles, and the controls are as tight as ever. But what really makes Castlevania IV shine is the truly innovative level design. At the time, rotating rooms, giant swinging chandeliers, and spinning hallways were benchmarks of the SNES's hardware capabilities. Today the technology isn't so impressive, but the creativity is. Titles like this are perfect examples of why classic side-scrollers still have such a rabid following. The only real downside to this title is that it is a tad short, but that just makes it all the easier to pick up and enjoy for a nice afternoon gaming session.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** KONAMI OF AMERICA ■ **DEVELOPER** KONAMI ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1991

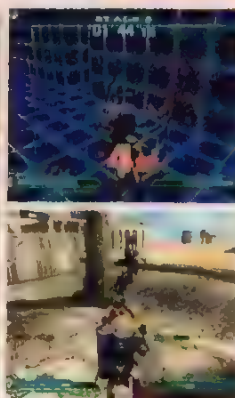
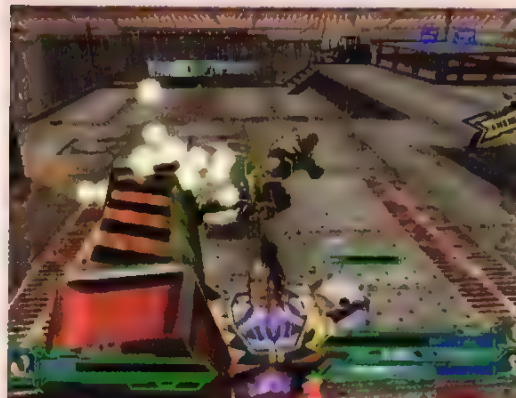
DREAMCAST

# HEAVY METAL: GEOMATRIX



RETRO RATING

3.5



The fighting games released by Capcom are usually greeted with enthusiasm, but even the makers of the Street Fighter series make mistakes. Heavy Metal: Geomatrix is one such low point. Loosely tied to the movie *Heavy Metal 2000*, this 3D Dreamcast title looks great (better than many PS2 games, in fact), but has nothing to offer outside of pretty visuals. Every one of the fighters is completely uninspired (there are actually characters named Slash, Sarge, and Stabl), and the weapons are equally familiar. Combat combines both melee and ranged weapons, but both are as shallow as can be. But the most obnoxious aspect of Geomatrix is the severely uneven difficulty level. One-on-one matches are a walk in the park, while the two-on-one fights are nearly impossible. The Chaosmatrix mode, in which players complete objectives, offers no viable alternative to the arcade mode, as it is just as dull and lacks the compelling visuals. The Dreamcast was capable of great things, but Geomatrix certainly isn't one of them.

■ **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING ■ **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM ■ **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 2001

SNES

# THE DEATH AND RETURN OF SUPERMAN



RETRO RATING

7



Given the disappointing Superman-related tripe this gaming generation has churned out, leave it to Blizzard circa 1993 to do things right...or at least not poorly. This game centers around the *Superman* comics story arc from the early '90s when Superman apparently died, and four Super-poseurs, each one bearing some resemblance to Superman, appeared, claiming to be the real deal. You play as a different Super-dude depending on the level, marauding through streets and caves with a variety of moves, the most entertaining one being the ability to constantly whip evildoers against the walls in the background. The major thing missing from the game (apart from that foxy Lois Lane) is a multiplayer mode found in similar titles like *Double Dragon II* or *Final Fight*. Sure, the point of the game is that there can only be one real Superman, but being able to team up and bust some heads would have made this game worth playing more than once. As it is, Superman dies, returns, and then goes back to the box from whence he came.

■ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ■ **PUBLISHER** SUNSOFT ■ **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ■ **YEAR RELEASED** 1993

## SEGA HOT WHEELS

> **Manufacturer:** Mattel > **Website:** hotwheels.com > **List Price:** \$98 Each

Check out these rides! These limited edition Hot Wheels cars each feature art based on recent Sega games. For players who are also car fans, there is nothing better. There are vehicles with wicked themes from Space Channel 5, Shinobi, Super Monkey Ball, Jet Set Radio, and House of the Dead. We don't know why the characters from these games would need cars, but frankly, we don't care. It conjures some pretty amusing mental images. Imagine that you're driving down the road, and a car pulls up along side you. It's got the House of the Dead logo on it, and it's filled with zombies. Then the zombies cut you off, take the next exit, head into the mall, and buy some slacks. Just because they're dead doesn't mean that they don't care about the latest spring fashions.



## JAKKS TV GAMES

> **Manufacturer:** Jakks Pacific > **Website:** jakkstvgames.com > **List Price:** \$24.99

The popular TV Games line is back with two new plug and play controllers: the redesigned Activision TV Games and the all-new SpongeBob SquarePants TV Games. The Activision controller features 10 classic titles, such as Pitfall, River Raid, and Spider Fighter, all in one handy-dandy retro-style controller. The SpongeBob controller sports five all-new games starring the porous yellow one, with the best graphics yet for the TV Games line. But what's even cooler than that is that the controller is shaped like SpongeBob! Finally, our dream of playing games by grabbing someone's nose has come true. Our therapist Dr. Weinstock says this could be a valuable tool in our recovery. He also says we should stop grabbing his face. We swear there's a game of Mario Kart going on inside his head. He disagrees.



*This joystick looks like what people thought controllers of 2004 would look like back in 1982. People were idiots back then*

## CODE BREAKER FOR PLAYSTATION 2

> **Manufacturer:** Pelican > **Website:** codebreaker.com > **List Price:** \$29.99

Admit it, you're a cheater. A filthy, filthy cheater. Don't lie to us, you naughty little ferret you, we can see deep within your soul. We know what darkness lies within. We also know that you're having trouble finding all the platinum bolts in Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando. Fear not, the Code Breaker is here to help you out of your sticky wicket. With this program and a USB flash drive (sold separately), you can download over 30,000 cheats for over 500 games. Simply download the codes to the USB drive and plug it into your PS2, and you're golden. And with "Day 1" support, codes will be online for a game the first day it is on sale. How cool is that? If only we could download cheats to help us pass our Bar exam. It is our dream to one day start the Law Offices of Game Informer, where we'll settle any claim for only 99 bucks!



## THE OFFICE: THE COMPLETE SECOND SERIES

> **Manufacturer:** BBC America/Warner Brothers Home Video  
> **Website:** bbctheoffice.com > **List Price:** \$24.98

Welcome to the Game Informer DVD corner! Today we've got two very different offerings for you. The first is the second series of *The Office*, the hit British sitcom and winner of several prestigious comedy and television awards. Anyone who has ever worked in a frustrating work environment will identify with the harried workers in the Wernham Hogg Paper Company. The humor is shocking, crass, offensive, and simply brilliant. It's certainly not a show for everyone, but those who appreciate British wit will get a huge kick out of the world's most horrible boss, David Brent. Trust us, you'll think it's hilarious. We guarantee it. If you don't like it, you can punch us. And by "us," we mean Matt. He can take it, because he's tough. You should see that guy's abs!



## RETURNER

> **Manufacturer:** Columbia/TriStar Home Entertainment  
> **Website:** sonypictures.com/homevideo > **List Price:** \$24.96

If you prefer action to saucy British humor, then we've got a film for you. *Returner* is an action-packed sci-fi romp about a time Traveller who comes back to the present day in order to find the first alien to land on Earth and prevent a full-scale invasion. It's chock full of cool flippy kung fu, crazy gun battles, and some zany humor. Pretty boss, huh? But if you need any more reason to check this film out (you people, always wanting more. We're only human! How much can we give?), then the fact that it is a film by the same director that did *Onimusha 3*'s CG cutscenes should entice you. When you see the opening of that game, then you'll know exactly why that's so cool. Between these two DVD recommendations, you'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll jump for joy, and you'll exclaim "Forget you, Ebert and other guy, I don't need you anymore. Now I have good ol' GI to recommend movies for me. Thank you, GI." No, thank you.





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